DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 251 RC 022 206

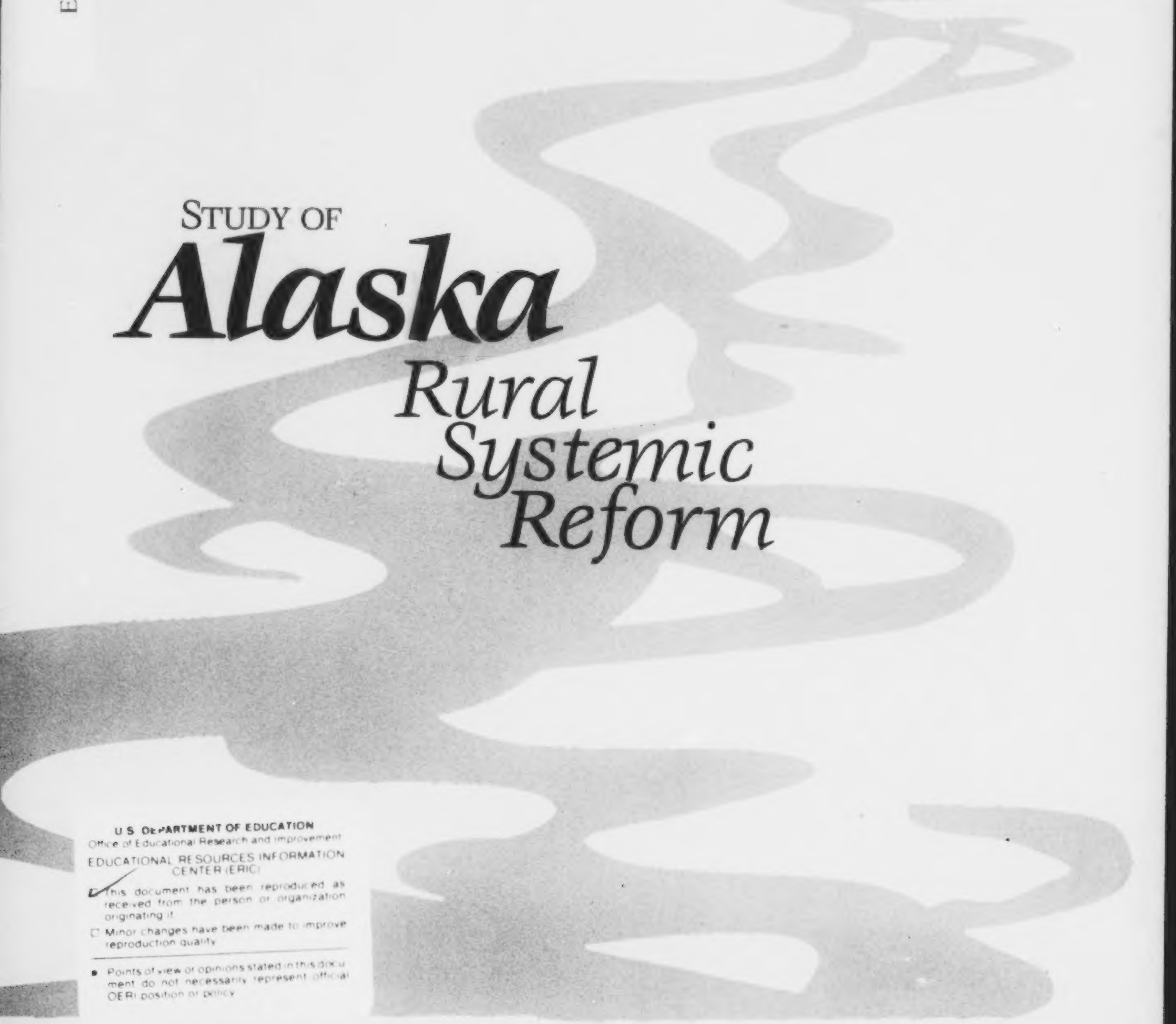
AUTHOR	Kushman, James W.; Barnhardt, Ray
TITLE	Study of Alaska Rural Systemic Reform. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR.; Alaska Univ., Fairbanks.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. on the Education of At-Risk Students (ED/OERI), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-10-00
NOTE	125p.; For the case studies, see RC 022 207-213.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Alaska Natives; American Indian Culture; *American Indian Education; Case Studies; Culturally Relevant Education; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; *School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Alaska; Cultural Integration; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; *Systemic Educational Reform

ABSTRACT

A 3-year study of educational reform in rural Alaska centered around case studies in seven rural communities and school districts serving primarily Eskimo and American Indian students. Each community had embarked on a reform process called Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) that strove to create educational partnerships between schools and their communities. The study examined how educational partnerships were formed and sustained and how they ultimately benefited Alaska Native students. A focal point was the nature of systemic change, which in rural Alaska means to fully integrate the indigenous knowledge system and the formal education system. Major findings that emerged from a cross-case analysis of the case studies were categorized into six themes: (1) sustained long-term reform; (2) strong and consistent leadership; (3) personal relationships between school personnel and community; (4) educational partnerships; (5) rural schools and communities; and (6) educational goals. The report includes executive summaries of the seven case studies and reform-related recommendations for rural schools. (Contains 25 references.) (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 437 251



STUDY OF
Alaska
Rural Systemic Reform

U S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

RC 022 206

FINAL REPORT

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
School Improvement Program
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204-3297
503-275-9629
Fax 503-275-9621

Study of Alaska Rural Systemic Reform

Final Report

James W. Kushman
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Ray Barnhardt
University of Alaska Fairbanks

with contributions
by other case study authors

October 1999

This research was supported by funds from the National Institute on Education of At-Risk Students, Office of Educational Research & Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions and points of view expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position of the funder and no official endorsement should be inferred.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research involved the work of a learning community of more than 30 university and laboratory researchers and community researchers from seven rural Alaska communities, as listed below—these different voices and perspectives enriched our case studies.

Aniak/Kalskag (Kuspuk School District)
Bruce Miller; Senior Researcher, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Polossa Evans; Teacher Aide/Upriver Secretary, Lower Kalskag
Samantha John; Community Member, Aniak
Stan Lujan; Assistant to the Superintendent, Kuspuk SD
Bertha Passamika; Library Aide, Aniak
Mike Savage; School Board Member, Lower Kalskag

Klawock (Klawock City School District)
Jim Kushman; Senior Researcher, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Donna Jackson; Community Member, Klawock
Ann James; Teacher, Klawcok
Rob Steward; School Counselor, Klawock

Koyukuk (Yukon-Koyukuk School District)
Beth Leonard; Senior Researcher, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Tim Cline; District Office, Yukon-Koyukuk SD
Sarah Dayton; School Staff/Community Member, Koyukuk
Charles Esmailka, District Office, Yukon-Koyukuk SD
Heidi Imhof; Teacher, Koyukuk

New Stuyahok (Southwest Region School District)
Jerry Lipka; Senior Researcher, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Natalia Bond; Secretary, New Stuyahok
Margie Hastings; Teacher, New Stuyahok
Ron Mebius; Principal, New Stuyahok

Quinhagak (Lower Kuskokwim School District)
Carol Barnhardt; Senior Researcher, University of Alaska Fairbanks
John Mark; Principal, Quinhagak
Susan Murphy; District Officd, Lower Kuskokwim SD
Nita Rearden; Language Development Specialist, Bethel
Dora Strunk; Teacher, Quinhagak

Tatitlek (Chugach School District)
Sarah Landis; Senior Researcher, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Joan Shaughnessy, Senior Researcher, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
Anna Gregorieff; Community Member, Tatitlek
Dennis Moore; Head Teacher, Tatitlek
Roger Sampson; Superintendent Chugach SD

Tuluksak (Yupiit School District)
Oscar Kawagley; Senior Researcher, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Ray Barnhardt; Senior Researcher, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Freda Alexie; Bilingual Aide, Tuluksak
Sarah Owen; School Secretary, Tuluksak
John Weise; Superintendent Yupiit SD

We would like to thank Robert E. Blum, Program Director for NWREL's School Improvement Program, for his support and help as project director and his relentless pursuit of educational excellence.

Kelly Tonsmiere and Roxy Kohler of the Alaska Staff Development Network provided invaluable assistance in organizing events to bring our community of learners and researchers together to plan and analyze data. Christine Crooks performed a wonderful job of capturing the sights and sounds of several case study communities through the production of several videos.

Sue Mitchell of Inkworks provided the needed editorial assistance as did members of NWREL's School Improvement Program support team, including Meg Waters and Linda Gipe. We thank Denise Crabtree and Sue Mitchell for cover design.

From the National Institute of Education of At-Risk Students, we are grateful to Beth Fine and Karen Suagee for their help, support, and personal interest in this study.

Finally, we are forever grateful to the educators and community members who allowed us access to their communities so that all Alaska educators can better understand how to create educational success for rural Alaska students.

Jim Kushman
Ray Barnhardt
Co-Principal Investigators

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements i

Contents iii

Executive Summary v

Chapter 1. A Long Journey Begins at Home 1

- A Brief History of Educational Reform in Rural Alaska 1
- Alaska Case Studies 9
- Participatory Research Methods 13
- Alaska Onward to Excellence 14
- Community Voice 16
- Organization of This Report 17

Chapter 2. Case Study Executive Summaries 19

- Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat: The School of the People of Quinhagak 19
- Closing the Gap: Education and Change in New Stuyahok 30
- A Long Journey: Alaska Onward to Excellence in Yupiit/Tuluksak Schools 38
- Community Voice and Educational Change: Aniak and Kalskag Villages 48
- Creating a Strong, Healthy Community: Ella B. Vernetti School, Koyukuk 56
- Making School Work in a Changing World: Tatitlek Community School 63
- It Takes More Than Good Intentions to Build a Partnership: Klawok City Schools 70

Chapter 3. Cross-Case Findings and Conclusions 78

- Sustaining Reform 78
- Shared Leadership 83
- Building Relationships and Trust 86
- Enacting New Roles 88
- Creating Coherent Reforms 91
- Creating Healthy Communities 95

Chapter 4. Recommendations 98

References 107

7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a three-year study of educational reform in rural Alaska communities and schools. The research centers around seven case studies in villages and school districts spanning western, central, and southeast Alaska. These are primarily subsistence communities serving Eskimo and Indian students. Each community had embarked on a reform process called Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) that strives to create educational partnerships between schools and the communities they serve.

The study examined how educational partnerships are formed and sustained and how they ultimately benefit Alaska Native students. Trying to understand the systemic nature of educational change was a focal point of the study. In rural Alaska, systemic change means fully integrating the indigenous knowledge system and the formal education system. For rural school districts, this means engaging communities deeply in education; fully integrating Native culture, language, and ways of knowing into the curriculum; and meeting Alaska's state-driven academic standards and benchmarks—all at the same time.

Each case study was led by a researcher from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory or University of Alaska Fairbanks who worked with a small team of school practitioners and community members who participated fully in the research. The case studies tell what happened as rural schools embarked on a change journey through AOTE and other reform activities, paying attention to important educational accomplishments and setbacks, community voice, and the experiences and learning of students. The cases include qualitative and quantitative evidence, although hard data on student performance was limited and often inappropriate to the educational goals pursued by communities.

Through a cross-case analysis, six reform themes and major findings emerged:

- *Sustaining reform:* It is easy to start new reforms but difficult to keep up the momentum in order to bring about deep changes in teaching and learning. Our case studies show that sustaining serious educational reform over the long run is a difficult but not impossible task in rural Alaska. There were a variety of scenarios, including communities that could not successfully launch an AOTE reform effort, those which had many starts and stops on a long and winding road towards important community goals, and at least one exceptional community (Quinhagak) that has been able to create and sustain a Yup'ik first-language program for more than a decade. The most significant barrier to sustaining reforms is persistent teacher, principal, and superintendent turnover. Turnover derails reform efforts and leads to a cycle of reinventing school every two or three years. A process like AOTE can help alleviate the turnover problem by creating leadership within the community, especially when respected community elders and other leaders are brought into the process. But to seriously sustain reforms, districts and local communities need to develop talent from within so that teachers have strong roots in the communities where they teach.

- *Shared leadership:* Leadership needs to be defined as shared decision making *with* the community rather than seeking advice *from* the community. Strong and consistent superintendent leadership was an important factor in moving reforms forward in some of these small communities and districts. However, school leaders must believe and act on the principle of shared decision making in order to engage the community through long term educational changes that benefit students. Shared leadership creates the community ownership that will move educational changes through frequent staff turnover. School leaders must view a process like AOTE as a tool for developing community engagement and leadership rather than a school program that seeks the community's advice.
- *Building relationships and trust:* Personal relationships and trust are at the heart of successful reform, and processes like AOTE are only effective when good relationships exist between school personnel and community members. Strong relationships are based on a mutual caring for children and cross-cultural understanding rather than a specific reform agenda. In small communities, personal relationships are more central than formal decision processes as the way to get things done. A key teacher, principal, leadership team member, parent, or elder who is highly respected in the community can spark the change process. It is these respected people and their relationships with others that help the whole community develop an understanding of and connection to the principles of an external reform model like AOTE. Too much emphasis can be placed on process and procedure from the outside

and not enough on building the relationships and trust from the inside. Reformers in rural settings might fare better if they worked to fully understand the local context and build reforms from the inside out rather than relying solely on external reform models.

- *Enacting new roles:* Educators and community members are often stuck in old roles while educational partnerships require new behaviors and ways of thinking. While it is easy to talk about creating partnerships, changing traditional roles is a learning process for both school personnel and parents. The mindset that parent and teacher domains are separate—and should remain so—hampers family involvement efforts. Our case studies reveal that without a compelling goal deeply rooted in community values, like preserving language and cultural knowledge, many parents and community members are content to leave education to the educators. Yet in small rural settings, there are many avenues for parents, elders, and other community members to be involved in school as volunteers, teacher aides, other paid workers, and leadership team members. Rural schools need to create a range of parent involvement strategies appropriate for small communities. Historical divisions between school personnel and Alaska Native parents still need to be overcome. A partnership process like AOTE must strive to rekindle the spirit of a people who feel marginalized by the education system rather than part of it.
- *Creating coherent reforms:* Small rural communities and school districts need help in sorting through many ongoing reforms in order to create a more unified approach to educational and community change. There are many independent reform activities in these communities with few connections. AOTE was a positive force in most communities because it helped set a clear direction and vision for student success and provided opportunities for school personnel and community members to think about and talk about how everyone should work together to educate children in a changing world. AOTE was less successful as a force for substantially changing teaching and learning. Here there was often confusion or lethargy about taking action because there were already so many educational programs in place. How AOTE fit into this picture was unclear to participants. In rural Alaska, there is a boom or bust cycle of programs related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and technology. Yet some

cases showed more unity of purpose and were able to progress towards reform goals, make significant changes in educational practice, and see students improve. These places often exhibited the enabling characteristics described above including stability of school leaders and teachers, shared decision making which empowers communities while expecting improved student results, a climate of trust and caring, and the ability to find the human and material resources to achieve goals like bilingualism. Many elements have to come together for classroom-level changes to occur, not the least of which are creativity, hard work, and time.

- *Creating healthy communities:* Schools in small rural communities cannot achieve their educational goals in isolation from the well-being of the surrounding community. The AOTE visioning process brought out the deeper hopes, dreams, and fears of communities that are trying to preserve their identity and ways of life in a global and technological world. AOTE resulted in districts and communities challenging themselves to simultaneously achieve high cultural standards and high academic standards as a means to improved community health. People also expect the education system to help young people respect their elders, respect themselves, stay sober and drug free, and learn self-discipline. There was a clear sense that education and community health are inextricably linked. Education is viewed as more than achieving specific academic standards and benchmarks. While the desire is there to integrate Native knowledge and Western schooling, educators in rural Alaska do not yet have all the tools and know-how to achieve this end. More resources are needed to create culturally-appropriate teacher resources. Proposed funding cuts to Alaska's rural schools could threaten further progress. Nevertheless, our case studies offer many positive examples of bicultural and bilingual education that can create more holistic and healthy communities in rural Alaska, with the added benefit of improved student achievement.

The following recommendations are offered to educators and policy makers based on the study. While directed to the Alaska audience, these recommendations apply in large part to rural schools and communities anywhere in the country.

1. Stabilize professional staff in rural schools.
2. Provide role models and support for creating a positive self-image to which students can aspire.
3. Parent involvement needs to be treated as a partnership with more shared decision making.
4. Implement teacher orientation, mentoring, and induction programs in rural schools.
5. Eliminate testing requirements that interfere with language immersion programs.
6. Strategic planning needs to extend to the next generation or more (20-plus years) at the state and local levels.
7. Strengthen curriculum support for culturally responsive, place-based approaches that integrate local and global academic and practical learning.
8. Encourage the development of multiple paths for students to meet the state standards.
9. Extend the cultural standards and Native ways of knowing and teaching into teacher preparation programs.
10. Sustainable reform needs to be a bottom up rather than a top down process and has to have a purpose beyond reform for reform's sake.
11. Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) should be put forward as a means (process) rather than an end in itself (program).
12. Form a coalition of organizations to sponsor an annual conference on rural education that keeps reform issues up to date and forward reaching.

These findings and recommendations are discussed more thoroughly in the body of the report.

CHAPTER 1

A LONG JOURNEY BEGINS AT HOME

This report presents a study of educational reform in rural Alaska Native communities. Researchers from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the University of Alaska Fairbanks collaborated on a three-year study of Alaska communities and schools that were involved in varying reform efforts, including Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE). This final report presents the major study findings and recommendations. It is intended for educators and policymakers in Alaska and other regions of the country who serve rural, indigenous communities. Accompanying this report are the seven case studies, which provide the qualitative and quantitative database on which conclusions and recommendations are based.

Rural Alaska Native communities face new educational challenges. Monetary support for rural schools is eroding within Alaska while reformers everywhere are calling for higher academic standards. Low test scores, harsh teaching conditions, and poor community health are, unfortunately, what sticks in many people's minds when they think of education in the Alaska bush. Certainly there are educational problems, but the underlying issues are not well understood. We do know that part of the problem is a dissonance between two complex systems for educating Alaska Native students: the indigenous knowledge rooted in Alaska Native culture, language, and traditions and the formal education system designed by others to serve rural Alaska (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999; Lipka, 1998). Research is needed to help us better understand how to bridge this gap and create a more congruent educational system.

A Brief History of Educational Reform in Rural Alaska

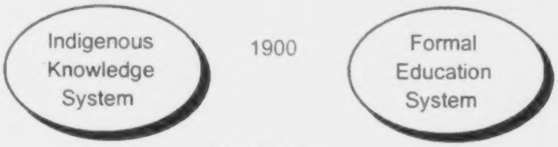
By most indicators, the maturity level of the formal education system in Alaska is at the adolescent stage. The constantly shifting array of legislative and regulatory policies impacting schools make it clear that they are still in an evolving, emergent state that is far from equilibrium. This is especially true in rural Alaska, where the chronic disparities in academic performance, ongoing dissonance between school and community, and yearly turnover of personnel place the educational systems in a constant state of uncertainty and reconstruction. Schools are still struggling to form an identity and role for themselves as they relate to the educational needs of rural communities.

The continuous search for new personnel, each with their own externally derived strategy for educational reform, leaves the educational system vulnerable to a never-ending cycle of buzzword solutions to complex problems. Each is tried for a year or two without any cumulative beneficial effect, only to start the process over again as personnel rotate through the districts, taking the institutional memory with them. Within the last decade alone, rural education in one corner of the state or another has been subjected to variations on mastery learning, Madeline Hunter techniques, outcome-based education, total quality learning, site-based management, strategic planning, and many other imported quick fixes to long-standing endemic problems, right up to the current emphasis on "standards." The short-term lifespan of these well-intentioned but poorly thought through and ill-fated responses to rural school problems has only added more confusion and turmoil to a system that is already teetering on the edge of chaos.

From a systemic school reform perspective, however, there are advantages to working with systems that are operating "at the edge of chaos," in that they are more receptive and susceptible to innovation and change as they seek equilibrium and order in their functioning (Waldrop, 1994). Such is the case for many of the educational systems in rural Alaska, for historical as well as unique contextual reasons, and it is to understanding the dynamics of systemic reform in such a context that the rural Alaska case studies are directed.

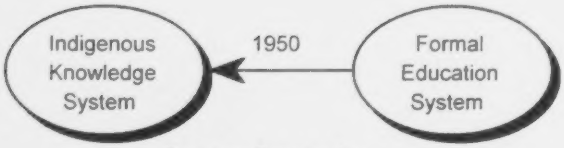
By most any standards, nearly all of the 586,000 square miles and 245 communities that make up the state of Alaska would be classified as "rural." Approximately 40% of the 600,000+ people living in Alaska are spread out in 240 small, isolated communities ranging in size from 25 to 5,000, with the remaining 60% concentrated in a handful of "urban" centers. Anchorage, with approximately 50% of the total population, is the only potential metropolitan area in the state. Of the rural communities, over 200 are remote, predominantly Native (Aleut, Eskimo, and Indian) villages in which 70% of the 90,000 Alaska Natives live. The vast majority of the Native people in rural Alaska continue to rely on subsistence hunting and fishing for a significant portion of their livelihood, coupled with a slowly evolving cash-based economy. Few permanent jobs exist in most communities. The percentage of people living in "poverty" in rural communities in Alaska ranges from 15% to 50%, with the average cash income under $20,000.

From the time of the arrival of the Russian fur traders in the late 1700s up to the influx of miners in the early 1900s, the relationship between most of the Native people of Alaska and education in the form of schooling (which was reserved primarily for the immigrant population at that time) may be characterized as two mutually independent systems with little if any contact, as illustrated by the following diagram:



Dual System

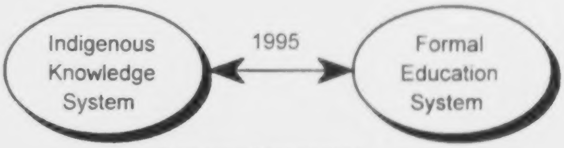
Before the epidemics that wiped out over 60% of the Alaska Native population in the early part of the 20th century, most Native people continued to live a traditional self-sufficient lifestyle with only limited contact with fur traders and missionaries (Napoleon, 1991). The oldest of the Native elders of today grew up in that traditional cultural environment, and they still retain the deep knowledge and high language that they acquired during their early childhood years. They are also the first generation to have experienced significant exposure to schooling, many of them having been orphaned as a result of the epidemics. Schooling, however, was strictly a one-way process at that time, mostly in distant boarding schools, with the main purpose being to assimilate Native people into Western society. The missionaries and school teachers were often one and the same. Given the total disregard (and often derogatory attitude) toward the indigenous knowledge and belief systems in the Native communities, the relationship between the two systems was limited to a one-way flow of communication and interaction up through the 1950s, and thus can be characterized as follows:



One-way Transaction

By the early 1960s, elementary schools had been established in most Native communities, administered by either the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Alaska State-Operated School System, both centrally administered systems with the primary goal of bringing Alaska Natives into mainstream society. The history of inadequate performance by the two school systems, however, coupled with the ascendant economic and political power of Alaska Natives, led to the dissolution of the centralized systems in the mid-1970s and the establishment of 21 locally controlled regional school districts to take over the responsibility of providing education in rural communities. That placed the rural school systems serving Native communities under local political control for the first time, while concurrently a new system of secondary education was established that students could access in their home community. A class-action lawsuit brought against the State of Alaska on behalf of rural Alaska Native secondary students led to the creation of 126 village high schools to serve those rural communities where before, high school students had to leave home to attend boarding schools.

These two steps, along with the development of bilingual and bicultural education programs under state and federal funding and the influx of a limited number of Native teachers, opened the doors for the beginning of two-way interaction between the schools and the Native communities they served, as illustrated by the following diagram depicting rural education in the mid-1990s (when the current round of systemic reform initiatives were initiated):



Two-way Transaction

Although the creation of the regional school districts (along with several single-site and borough districts) and the village high schools had provided rural communities with an opportunity to exercise a greater degree of operational control over the educational systems operating in rural Alaska, it did not lead to any appreciable change in what is taught and how it is taught in those systems. The continuing inability of schools to be effectively integrated into the fabric of many rural communities after over 20 years of local control pointed to the critical need for a broad-based systemic approach to addressing educational conditions in rural Alaska.

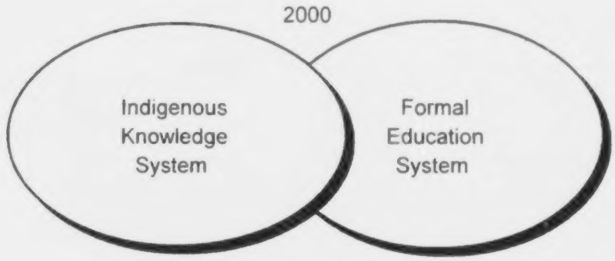
Despite the structural and political reforms that took place in the 1970s and '80s, rural schools have continued to produce a dismal performance record by most any measure. Native communities continue to experience significant social, cultural, and educational problems, with most indicators placing communities and schools in rural Alaska at the bottom of the scale nationally. While there has been some limited representation of local cultural elements in the schools (e.g., story-telling, basket-making, sled-building, songs and dances), it has been at a fairly superficial level with only token consideration given to the significance of those elements as integral parts of a larger complex adaptive cultural system that continues to imbue people's lives with purpose and meaning outside the school setting. Though there has been some minimum level of interaction between the two systems, functionally they have remained worlds apart, with the professional staff overwhelmingly non-Native (94% statewide) and with a turnover rate averaging 30 to 40% annually.

These disparities and discontinuities were evident to the Native leadership within a few years of having gained local control of their schools, as indicated by the following observations of Eben Hopson, mayor of the North Slope Borough, which had taken over its school system in the early 1970s:

> Today, we have control over our educational system. We must now begin to assess whether or not our school system is truly becoming an Inupiat school system, reflecting Inupiat educational philosophies, or, are we in fact only theoretically exercising "political control" over an educational system that continues to transmit white urban culture? Political control over our schools must include "professional control" as well, if our academic institutions are to become an Inupiat school system able to transmit our Inupiat traditional values and ideals. (1977)

In 1994, the Alaska Natives Commission, a federal/state task force that had been established to conduct a comprehensive review of programs and policies impacting Native people, released a report calling for Alaska Native people to be more directly involved in all matters impacting their lives and communities, including education. The long history of failure of external efforts to manage the lives and needs of Native people made it clear that outside interventions were not the solution to the problems and that Native communities themselves would have to shoulder a major share of the responsibility for carving out a new future. At the same time, existing government policies and programs would need to relinquish control and provide latitude and support for Native people to address the issues in their own way, including the opportunity to learn from their mistakes (Alaska Federation of Natives, 1994).

With these considerations in mind, recent rural education reform initiatives have sought to increase communication and bridge the gap between the formal education systems and the indigenous communities in which they are situated. In so doing, current reform initiatives are seeking to bring the two systems together in a manner that promotes a synergistic relationship. In such a relationship, the two previously separate systems join to form a more comprehensive holistic system that can better serve all students, not just Alaska Natives, while at the same time preserving the essential integrity of each component of the larger overlapping system. The new interconnected, interdependent, integrated system that educational reformers are seeking to achieve today may be depicted as follows:



Systemic Integration

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Manuel Gomez (1977), in his analysis of the notion of systemic change in education, has indicated that "educational reform is essentially a cultural transformation process that requires organizational learning to occur: changing teachers is necessary, but not sufficient. Changing the organizational culture of the school or district is also necessary." This statement applies to both the formal education system and the indigenous knowledge systems in rural Alaska. To achieve the kind of "systemic integration" outlined above, the culture of the education system as reflected in rural schools must undergo radical change to become more accessible to the community, while at the same time the indigenous knowledge systems need to be documented, articulated, and validated in new ways if the local culture is to become a significant part of the school curriculum (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999; Lipka, Mohatt, & Ciulistet, 1998). The challenge for reform advocates is to identify the units of change that will produce the most results with the least effort by targeting the elements of the system that can serve as the catalysts around which the emergent order of a new system can coalesce (Peck & Carr, 1997). Once these critical agents of change have been appropriately identified, a "gentle nudge" in the right places can produce powerful changes throughout the system (Jones, 1994).

In response to these challenges, three major systemic reform efforts are currently underway in rural schools throughout Alaska, each with the goal of improving educational performance, but each with strategies that engage the reform process in different ways. The focus of the case studies that follow is on the evolution and impact of the first of the three initiatives to be implemented — Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE). The critical catalyst for reform embedded in the AOTE planning process has been engaging the community as a key player in shaping and monitoring the direction of the education system. This is evident from the rationale outlined by Tonsmeire in the original proposal to implement Onward to Excellence in rural Alaska:

> In this proposal we will outline a comprehensive, collaborative, integrated effort to use what works to help Alaskan educators assist rural, at risk children and youth in overcoming the barriers to high performance. This effort will focus on strategies to improve student performance in consideration of the context in which

> at risk children live and from which they come to school. Solutions that work for poor, minority children can and are found not in the school alone, but in the interactions among the school, the child, and the home. Therefore, we know this effort must draw upon, not ignore, the social, cultural, and economic context of home and community. (Tonsmeire, 1991)

From its inception, AOTE has been envisioned as a bottom-up systemic reform process aimed at building community ownership in what occurs in the educational system.

The second major systemic reform initiative to have a significant impact on schooling in rural Alaska — the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative (AQSI)— had its origins as an Alaskanized version of a national school reform effort, driven by the establishment of content standards, coupled with a legislatively mandated accountability system involving qualifying and benchmark exams for students, performance standards for professional staff, and accreditation standards and report cards for schools. The Alaska version of Goals 2000 has also placed an emphasis on parent, family, business and community involvement. Although the AQSI started out through the Alaska Department of Education as a carrot-based reform strategy with voluntary participation, it soon evolved into a stick-based approach as the political winds that were generated under the banner of "accountability" blew across the Alaska educational landscape. Under the new mandates, the diversity of individual, community, and cultural needs in rural Alaska tend to have little room for expression in the push for standardization through "a results-based system of school accountability" (Alaska Department of Education, 1998).

While the Alaska Onward to Excellence strategy has been focused on promoting community participation in defining educational priorities at the local level, and the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative has emphasized mandating standards for accountability from the state and national levels, the third systemic reform initiative — the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) — has pursued a strategy of engaging all levels in a coordinated effort aimed at systemic integration between the formal education system and the indigenous knowledge system of the community (Kawagley, 1995). The key catalyst for change around which the AKRSI educational reform strategy has been constructed has been the "Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools," developed by Alaska Native educators working in the formal education system coupled with the Native elders as the culture-bearers for the indigenous knowledge system

(Assembly of Alaska Native Educators, 1998). From these standards has grown an emphasis on "pedagogy of place," in which traditional ways of knowing and teaching are used to engage students in academic learning by building on the surrounding physical and cultural environment. Included in this process have been initiatives that engage students in learning through Native science camps and fairs, cultural atlases, place name maps, family histories, language immersion programs, subsistence activities, survival training, oral histories, elders-in-residence, etc. In addition, educators at the state and local level have been developing curriculum units, performance standards, and assessment measures that demonstrate the efficacy of integrating local materials and activities in the educational process. The role of the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative has been to guide these initiatives through an ongoing array of locally generated, self-organizing activities that produce the "organizational learning" needed to move toward a new form of educational system for rural Alaska.

While each of the three systemic reform strategies outlined above has strengths and limitations, together they reflect a powerful array of initiatives that cut across all facets of the educational landscape in rural Alaska, from strategic planning and goal-setting (AOTE), to curriculum development and teaching practices (AKRSI), to establishing standards, assessments and incentives for high performance (AQSI). The case studies that follow, though focused on Alaska Onward to Excellence, will provide insights on the process of systemic reform for rural schools in general. It is incumbent on Alaska educators to look deeply within themselves and the communities they serve to find ways of creating partnerships to help Alaska Native students succeed in two worlds. As one participant in the AOTE process put it as the magnitude of the challenge became evident: "A long journey begins at home."

Alaska Case Studies

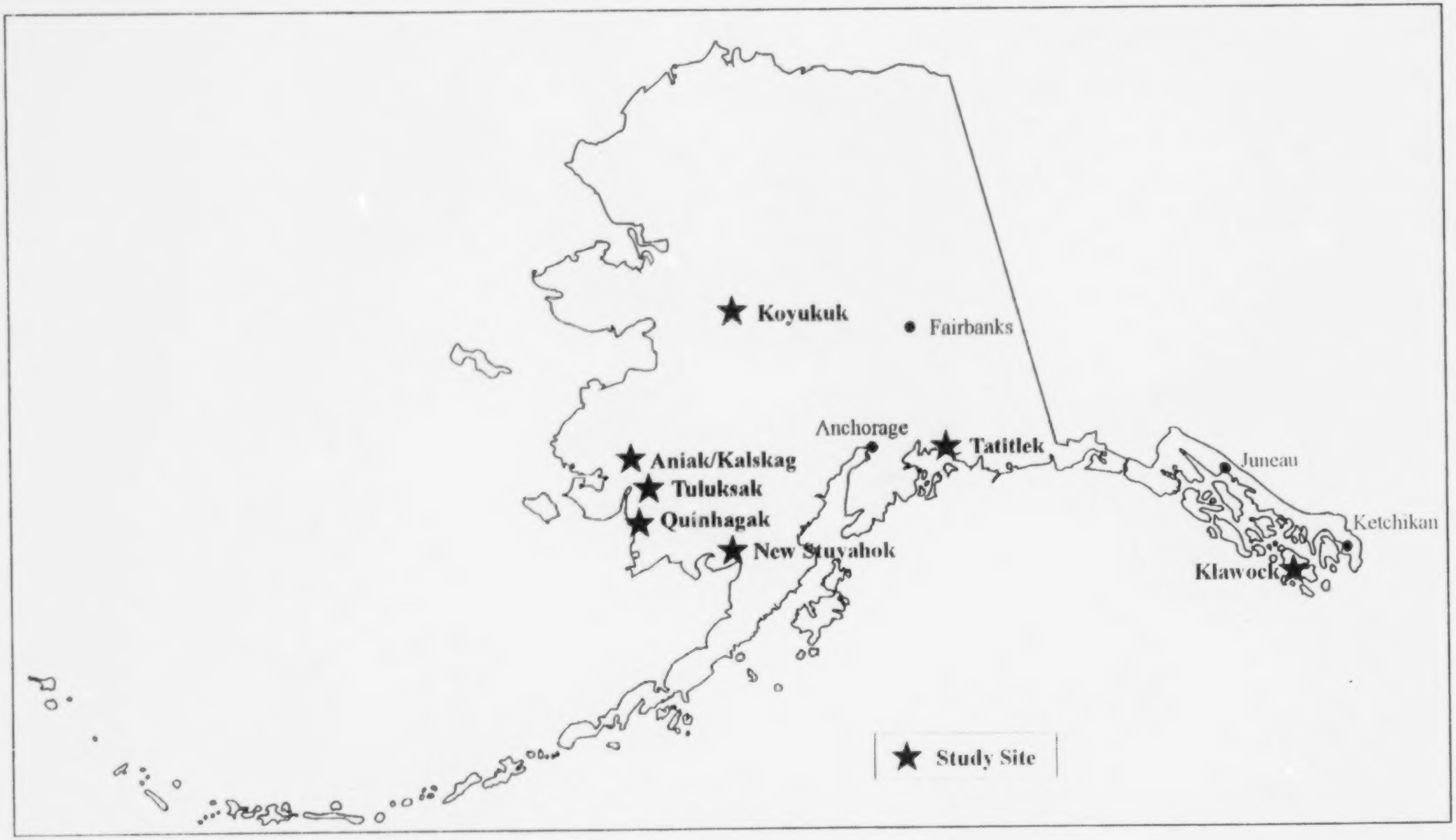
This research involved case studies of seven rural Alaska communities that have implemented Alaska Onward to Excellence. The case studies center around several broad research questions:

- Can schools and communities successfully work together to achieve common goals for rural Alaska Native students? What are the essential elements of this partnership? What factors promote the partnership and what barriers stand in the way? What sustains the partnership over time? How does a process like AOTE contribute to such partnerships?
- Does a partnership between school and community lead to real benefits for students? Under what conditions do the experiences and learning of students change for the better?
- What lessons can we learn from these case studies to guide future improvement efforts in rural Alaska or other similar communities across the country? What are the larger implications for Alaska Native and Native American education?

The seven communities we studied span western, central, and southeast Alaska and range in size from approximately 125 to 750 residents. While all of these communities participated in the AOTE process, they were quite diverse in demographics, community context, and history of school reform. The case study summaries in this report (and the full case studies) provide a richer description of each community. The seven village or small-town sites are listed below. Figure 1 shows their locations.

- *Quinhagak* in the Lower Kuskokwim School District, on the Kuskokwim Bay
- *New Stuyahok* in the Southwest Region School District, northeast of Bristol Bay and Dillingham.
- *Tuluksak* in the Yupiit School District, northeast of Bethel on the Lower Kuskokwim River
- *Aniak* and *Kalskag* (treated as a single case study of neighboring villages) in the Kuspuk School District, northeast of Bethel
- *Koyukuk* in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District, well west of Fairbanks on the Yukon River
- *Tatitlek* in the Chugach School District, on Prince William Sound near Valdez
- *Klawock*, a single-site school district (Klawock City Schools) on Prince of Wales Island, far southeastern Alaska near Ketchikan

Figure 1
Case Study Sites


Koyukuk
Fairbanks
Anchorage
Tatitlek
Juneau
Aniak/Kalskag
Tuluksak
Quinhagak
New Stuyahok
Ketchikan
Klawock
★ Study Site

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These communities are small isolated villages or towns reached by small airplane. Their schools, which can serve as few as 20 or as many as 200 students in grades K–12, come under the supervision of separate school districts in a system of Regional Educational Attendance Areas (REAA). Each REAA—some of which are as large as medium-sized states in the "Lower 48"—has the responsibility of educating children in their area. While there are state guidelines, each REAA has its own elected school board and has some latitude in designing a school system that makes sense for its region. Superintendents and school boards set policy and procedures, hire staff, establish budgets, choose curriculum, and make other important decisions that affect schooling in these small communities.

In rural village schools, students are typically educated in one or two prefabricated school buildings (including a high school and a gymnasium) and often in multigrade classrooms. Instruction in the early years may be in a Native language (such as Yup'ik) and most schools today try to incorporate at least some Alaska Native cultural components into the curriculum. While teachers often come from the outside, community members serve as classroom and bilingual aides (Barnhardt, 1994).

Sports such as boys basketball and girls volleyball are an important part of school life, providing students with opportunities to travel to other villages and to large cities like Anchorage. Field trips, career fairs, and state academic decathlons are other ways that educational opportunities are expanded beyond the village. But most communities are subsistence villages, so that education also happens around important activities like hunting and fishing trips, during which time students may leave school for several days or more. Education also happens around important village events like potlatches, which feature traditional Native dance and stories. More and more, elders and other community members can be seen at schools as teachers of language, culture, and values. In short, efforts are being made to meld Western education and traditional village education, but this is often a struggle because of historical misunderstandings and mistrust between different cultures, languages, and ways of educating.

We have tried to capitalize on the diversity of the seven sites through a case study approach. Each case study is an important story in its own right, documenting both the successes and shortcomings of ongoing reform efforts, that has meaning to the people of this community and other similar communities both inside and outside of Alaska. We also conducted a cross-case analysis to shed light on the deeper issues of systemic change and identify school improvement mechanisms and processes that may generalize beyond individual communities.

Participatory Research Methods

Researchers, school personnel, and community members collaborated on this study mirroring the very partnership process we were trying to understand. We used a participatory action research approach that treats school practitioners and community members as co-researchers rather than "subjects" of study (Argyris & Schon, 1991). Too often, research has been conducted *on* rather than *with* Alaska Native people, based on external frameworks and paradigms that do not recognize the issues, research questions, and worldviews of those under study. For each community, a senior researcher from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory or University of Alaska Fairbanks led a small team of three to five school and community researchers who helped plan each case study, formulate guiding questions, collect data, and interpret results. A typical team consisted of a school district practitioner, a village school practitioner, at least one non-school community member, and in some cases a high-school student. The teams included both Alaska Natives and non-Natives who lived in the communities under study. This team composition resulted in a greater awareness of what happens daily in schools and communities, access to others who served as key informants, and a deeper understanding of history, culture, and relationships present in each community

The teams used traditional case study methods, including document analysis, participant and researcher observation, and surveys and interviews. Concept mapping was also used to more fully understand the many simultaneous reforms happening in these communities. We followed a pattern of collecting data via site visits and then meeting in a central Alaska location to share and discuss results. Each senior researcher spent approximately 10 to 12 days on site during three or four separate visits across two school years. Most of the community teams, with guidance from their senior researcher, also collected some data on their own in the form of participant observation, formal surveys, and interviews. We met in Anchorage six times (12 days) to work in small village teams and as a whole group to discuss and interpret results, design data collection techniques, and plan the next data collection steps. Senior researchers met together an additional four times (8 days) to plan the study and outline and write up findings. In this way, we refined the research questions and data collection as we engaged together in constant-comparative analysis.

Alaska Onward to Excellence

While the seven sites were quite diverse in their make-up and histories of school reform, what they shared in common was a district-initiated reform process called Alaska Onward to Excellence. In AOTE, school districts and village schools work closely with community stakeholders (parents, elders, other community members, and students) to establish a mission and student learning outcomes. Working through multi-stakeholder leadership teams, AOTE attempts to develop a school-community partnership and action plans to achieve these outcomes. This educational partnership was a focal point of our case studies.

Through a foundation grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust, the Alaska Staff Development Network and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) began designing the Alaska Onward to Excellence process in 1991. The vision of AOTE was to bring research-based practices to rural Alaska schools through a process that deeply involved the whole community in a district and school improvement process. AOTE, working simultaneously at the district and community school levels, tries to achieve four reform principles:

- *Focus on student learning.* AOTE begins with the belief that all students can learn and strives for equity and excellence in student learning. To achieve agreement on what students need to learn, the first step is direction setting, which results in a mission and student learning goals developed with broad input from parents, village elders, students, and school staff. A district mission and goals are developed with village input; village improvement teams then design action steps to achieve at least one district goal.

- *Everyone must be committed.* Community and schools share leadership for the improvement process through multi-stakeholder district and village leadership teams. The expectation is that parents and other community members are full partners in education and that schools and communities must work together to achieve student success. The district role is to support and monitor school improvement efforts at the community level.
- *Everyone will learn together.* Improvement equals learning for both adults and students. Before a mission and goals are set and before action plans are made, learning takes place so that decisions are informed by local culture and values as well as research-based practices.
- *Learning success will be measured.* Learning is supposed to be monitored in goal areas. In most goal areas (such as student fluency in both English and Yup'ik), this requires moving beyond typical standardized test results.

The AOTE process was first implemented in two rural Alaska districts in 1992–95 (Phase 1). Implementation was achieved through a series of on-site workshops led by the two NWREL developers of AOTE (Robert Blum and Thomas Olson) for district and village leadership teams. Additional technical assistance was also provided as needed. In 1995–97 (Phase 2), AOTE was expanded to three new districts with funds from a Goals 2000 Implementation Grant and a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Urban and Rural Reform Initiative. This new phase not only expanded the number of schools, but used a training-of-facilitators approach: each district and village sent small facilitator teams to Anchorage for training by the NWREL developers/trainers. Facilitators, in turn, trained and guided the work of local district and village leadership teams back in their districts and villages. In addition to leadership teams, a district research team was also formed and trained by NWREL to collect data that would help the leadership teams monitor progress towards their improvement goals. Finally, the Phase 3 expansion in 1996–98 followed the same training model as Phase 2, except that co-trainers from the Alaska Regional Assistance Center worked with the NWREL team to provide the facilitator and research team workshops and follow-up technical assistance.

The three phases together resulted in training and implementation of AOTE in 11 districts and 42 community schools.

The seven case study communities (in seven different districts) were strategically selected from all three phases of AOTE. Two Phase 1 sites—New Stuyahok in the Southwest Region School District and Tuluksak in the Yupiit School District—provided a look at sustainability of AOTE-led reforms over time. Three Phase 2 sites—Quinhagak in the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Koyukuk in the Yukon-Koyukuk School District, and Tatitlek in the Chugach School District—provided a look at the early stages of partnership and how action plans were carried out. Finally, two Phase 3 sites—Aniak/Kalskag in the Kuspuk School District and Klawock in the Klawock City School District—were intended to illustrate how school-community partnerships are formed during the start up of AOTE.

While AOTE was a focal point for school reform in all of these communities, it was by no means the only reform. As discussed earlier, there are currently two other major systemic reform efforts in Alaska. Many of the sites were also participating in the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, which is attempting to integrate indigenous knowledge and curriculum into the formal educational system. Increasingly, all Alaska districts and schools face new requirements from the state's Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, which stresses high learning standards and a new high-school graduation exit exam. Our goal was not to neatly sort out the impact of AOTE, a nearly impossible task anyway. Rather, we wanted to study and understand how reform happens, how roles and relationships change, how partnerships are sustained over time, and how AOTE adds value to the larger reform process.

Community Voice

In trying to understand reform and AOTE, our case studies focused on a key variable we called *community voice*. Community voice captures the essence of what we believe to be the important elements of a productive educational partnership between schools and communities in remote Alaska villages, whether or not they use AOTE. Our definition of community voice included four components:

- *shared decision making* or the extent to which community members (parents, elders, and others) have greater influence and decision-making power in educational matters
- *integration of culture and language* or the extent to which Native language, culture, ways of knowing, and a community's sense of place are woven into daily curriculum and instruction
- *parent/community involvement in educating children* or the extent to which parents, elders, and others have a strong presence and visibility in the school and otherwise participate in their children's education
- *partnership activities* or positive examples of the school and community working together to share responsibility for student success

What we are really talking about is full community participation and shared accountability. In our definition, educators need to be willing to listen to the voice of the community and share some of the decision-making power. A further validation of the community's voice means that local heritage, language, culture, and Native ways of knowing are legitimate parts of formal education and are viewed as strengths to build a school curriculum on. We would also expect to see parents and elders routinely involved in their children's education if there was a true partnership. Finally, we were searching for positive examples of school-community partnerships that will have a pervasive impact on students and that other communities might replicate. In simpler terms, community voice means connections between schools, families, and communities to promote student success. This concept is at the heart of AOTE and is likewise an element of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative.

Organization of This Report

A challenge in presenting the results of seven case studies is the sheer volume of descriptive data and how to present it in a readable manner for busy educators and policymakers. The full "thick descriptions" are presented elsewhere in a set of individually bound case studies. Chapter 2 of this report presents case study executive summaries, each written by the senior researcher who directed the study with his or her school/community team. Each summary presents a brief description of the community and research effort, followed by key findings and lessons learned about systemic reform. The third chapter presents our major conclusions around six reform themes. These themes and conclusions resulted from several meetings with senior researchers and teams in which we all stepped back from our own community findings and tried to draw out the larger conclusions and lessons about educational reform in rural Alaska. Finally, Chapter 4 presents our recommendations for educators and policymakers, with a primary focus on the Alaska audience. However, we believe that these recommendations are applicable in other regions of the country serving similar populations.

CHAPTER 2

CASE STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

Case study executive usummaries are presented in this chapter, including major findings and lessons learned about systemic change. The sites are presented in geographic order moving from southwestern Alaska, which has the greatest concentration of sites, to the interior and finally southeastern Alaska (see Figure 1 for site location). It is impossible to capture all of the rich detail in these summaries; readers interested in such detail can obtain the full case studies.

Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat:
The School of the People of Quinhagak

Carol Barnhardt
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Quinhagak, a Yup'ik Eskimo community of 550 people, sits on the southwest coast of Alaska close to where the Kanektok River flows into the Bering Sea. It is a region of Alaska where Yup'ik people have lived for thousands of years, and the name of the village, Quinhagak, is derived from *kuingnerraq,* which denotes the ever-changing course of the Kanektok as it regularly forms new channels, winding its way through the surrounding tundra. Today, the lifestyle of the people of Quinhagak continues to embody the name of their community—as is evident in the evolving practices that provide evidence of their ability to integrate the traditions and beliefs of their Yup'ik ancestors with the contemporary practices necessary for success in a rapidly changing modern world. Subsistence activities that range from hunting seal and caribou to fishing and gathering wild berries and greens are practiced; the Yup'ik language continues to be used in home, social, political, and educational contexts; a few residents continue to go to the river for their drinking water; and some people use dog sled teams. However, Quinhagak people today can also purchase all varieties of foods from their local store, enroll in college coursework delivered to them through computer and audio/video conferencing, watch television on nine different channels, travel in and out of their remote village on five regularly scheduled daily flights, and nearly all residents can communicate in both Yup'ik and English.

Although this might appear to be a community of contradictions, it is in fact a community where many residents are in the process of finding a satisfying and workable balance between old and new, traditional and contemporary, Western and non-Western ways of knowing and living. It is a community that has continued to place a high value and priority on the Yup'ik language, despite decades of English-only influences. It is a community that is exercising its tribal rights by assuming responsibilities previously delegated to state and federal authorities. It is a community where people have maintained their membership and participation in the Moravian church while continuing to practice and follow many Yup'ik beliefs and traditions. It is a community in which the daily lives of its residents make it evident that they have been successful in finding ways to integrate beliefs and practices that many people believe are incompatible.

Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat is the Yup'ik name of the school in Quinhagak—a name chosen by the community in 1980. Roughly translated, it means "the school of the people of Quinhagak." The name reflects the community's belief in the importance of local ownership and genuine involvement in the schooling process of its own children. In the past few years, Quinhagak people have made a concerted effort to initiate a range of programs in their 140-student, K–12 multigraded school that will provide their children with the tools and resources necessary to meaningfully integrate Yup'ik language, values, and beliefs into school practices and policies. This will provide them with the ability to be successful in meeting Yup'ik "life standards" as well as preparing them to meet the academic standards of the state of Alaska. The focus of the Quinhagak case study is on the efforts to integrate community and school practices and policies, with a description of the role that the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) process has played in this reform effort.

Influences of the Past

For nearly 100 years, the *modus operandi* of federal and state educational systems in Alaska was to ignore the history, culture, and language of Alaska Native people, and it is clear that even today the historical factors that helped to shape the social, political, and educational context of Quinhagak continue to exert a very direct influence. Although there has been a public elementary school in Quinhagak since 1903, many people were not able to complete more than a few years of schooling because of family responsibilities or because there was no local schooling opportunity beyond sixth grade. The first teachers in the Quinhagak School were associated with either the Moravian Church or the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Like most villages in this region, Quinhagak's school was managed by the BIA until the extensive and far-reaching decentralization, of Alaska's rural schools by the state legislature in 1976. Following the decentralization Quinhagak became formally associated with the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD)— the largest of the 24 newly established rural school districts in the state of Alaska.

Research Methods

Members of the Quinhagak case study team included John Mark, a member of the Quinhagak community and principal of Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat School; Dora Strunk, a member of the Quinhagak community and elementary teacher at Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat School; Nita Rearden, a Yup'ik language coordinator in the Bilingual and Curriculum Department of the Lower Kuskokwim School District; Susan Murphy, Assistant to the Superintendent of the Lower Kuskokwim School District; and myself. I served as a representative of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and had the responsibility of preparing the case study. Our team examined and reviewed community, school, and district materials for the case study gathered during: my three visits to Quinhagak; two visits to Bethel to meet with district personnel; and five whole-team meetings in Anchorage. I also met formally and informally with students, teachers, teachers aides and community members during my Quinhagak visits, observed in all the classrooms, and attended events that occurred during my visits (e.g., a community-wide graduation ceremony for students in kindergarten, eighth grade and twelfth grade—conducted almost entirely in Yup'ik). Some of the team members communicated regularly via e-mail. Three members were able to participate in state and national conference presentations. All but one of the Alaska Native certified teachers at Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat received their bachelor's degrees from UAF (and I had served as academic advisor for four of these seven teachers). Two of the team members were enrolled in UAF graduate courses during the project.

Major Findings

Connecting school and community is a primary goal of the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) process, and because of the centrality of this goal, the AOTE process found fertile ground when it was initiated in Quinhagak in 1995. Based on our case study team's initial review and then formal documentation of reform efforts in Quinhagak, it quickly became evident that most of the significant changes in the school in recent years were attempts to recognize and meaningfully integrate what is important and valued in the life of the community with the teaching and learning that occurs in school. The educational goals of the community, as identified by past practices and by the community-constructed AOTE plan and student learning goal (i.e., "students will learn to communicate more effectively in Yup'ik") advocate the use of what children already know, value, and are interested in. This knowledge base should serve as a solid foundation for academic growth and learning in all ten Alaska academic content areas including reading and writing, math, science, world languages, history, geography, government and citizenship, technology, arts, and skills for a healthy life. In Quinhagak the AOTE process reinforced and provided additional support for long-established beliefs and practices about the importance of merging school and community. The statements below provide evidence, documented in the case study, that the school and the community are merging in significant and multiple ways.

Evidence of Shared School/Community Values and Priorities in the Sights and Sounds of Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat

When one enters the front door of Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat, the sights and sounds make it immediately evident that this is not a school like one in downtown Anchorage or in rural Arkansas. A large banner high on the wall tells people *"Ikayuqluta Elitnaulta"* (Let's Learn Together), a bulletin board has materials written in Yup'ik and English, and there are photos of village elders in the hallways. A display of photos of teachers and other staff members in the school lets everyone know that the large majority of people who work in this school, including nearly half of the certified teaching staff, are Yup'ik people from the community. The principal, John Mark, is a lifelong member of the Quinhagak community. The *Daily Bulletin*, with all school news and information, is posted not only on the school's bulletin board, but also in several community locations because it is faxed daily to the IRA tribal office, the clinic, and the store in an effort to keep community members aware of school events and activities. The school library has large paintings on the walls with scenes of the Quinhagak area, and an "Alaska and Yup'ik Collection" that includes nearly every book that has been published in the Yup'ik language.

Evidence of Shared School/Community Values and Priorities in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Several of the most significant and pervasive responses to the goals of melding school and community priorities, increasing student learning, and communicating more effectively in Yup'ik are evident in the implementation of new or modified Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, as summarized below:

- Daily interaction in the school is in both Yup'ik and English. The language of instruction in kindergarten through third/fourth grade is Yup'ik, and report cards for students in grades K through 4 are printed in Yup'ik. Students in upper grades receive daily oral and written instruction in Yup'ik from the school's Yup'ik Language Leader.

- The Lower Kuskokwim School District provides summer institutes that support Yup'ik educators in preparing and producing of a wide range of curriculum materials in the Yup'ik language. Many materials are written and illustrated by Yup'ik educators.
- One of the primary considerations in selecting the new comprehensive, balanced reading/literacy program by LKSD in the 1998 school year was the desire to adopt a program and approach that would be appropriate for children who are striving for proficiency in both Yup'ik and English literacy.
- An extensive effort to integrate Yup'ik ways of knowing and Yup'ik belief systems across the K–12 curriculum and throughout the entire district was initiated through the development and use of Yup'ik thematic units that cover the entire academic school year. This curriculum provides students with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills related to Yup'ik values, beliefs, language, and lifestyles in grades K–12.
- In addition to enrolling in courses that meet all Alaska high-school requirements (e.g., English, math, science, social studies, physical education), high-school students in Quinhagak also participate in courses in computer/journalism, workplace basics, and wood I or II. In addition, each student is required by the local Quinhagak Advisory School Board to enroll in the Yup'ik Life Skills class (Kuingnerarmiut Yugtaat Elitnaurarkait) for two years. This class includes Yup'ik language and culture, Yup'ik orthography, and Yup'ik life skills.

Evidence of Shared School/Community Values in Choices Made for Assessment Policies and Practices

The Lower Kuskokwim School District, recognizing the complexity and challenge of valid assessment in schools that serve children from bilingual backgrounds, has been one of the most aggressive in its efforts to develop and use multiple types of assessments. The district has supported Quinhagak and other sites in their efforts to increase, and integrate within the curriculum, the use of assessments that are authentic and performance-based and that allow for more than one correct response.

As one of the pioneers in the state's effort to implement the Writing Process, the Lower Kuskokwim School District developed a Student Literacy Assessment Portfolio process that is directly related to the state student academic content standards in English and Language Arts. This process also supports the Yup'ik Language Program. All students in Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat have a literacy portfolio, and most student's portfolios include papers and projects in both Yup'ik and English.

There has been a steady increase in the norm-referenced standardized test scores of students in rural Alaska school districts over the past 10 years, including those in LKSD. In the past few years, it has been determined that the CAT5 and Degrees of Reading Power scores of 11th and 12th grade students in LKSD who have attended Yup'ik First Language schools are—on the average—higher than students who did not attend a YFL school.

Extracurricular academic assessment activities that Quinhagak students participate in include school and district-wide speech contests, and students can choose to compete in either Yup'ik or English. A more diverse group of people (including school board members, elders, AOTE team members and parents) is now becoming more directly involved in the assessment process in Quinhagak and some other LKSD sites, to help determine if students are reaching the goals set by the community, the school, the district, and the state.

Evidence of Increasing Opportunities for Family and Community Participation and Meaningful Involvement in the School

In addition to changing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment goals and practices, Quinhagak is developing more incentives and opportunities for increased family and community participation in the education of their children.

- Many parents in Quinhagak are now directly involved in their school because they are serving as the school's teachers, aides, cooks, custodians—and principal.
- Several community members serve their school in other positions. Those on the Advisory School Board deal with matters ranging from setting the school calendar to approving changes in the school's bilingual program and AOTE goals, helping establish budget priorities, to annual approval of the school's principal. The AOTE

process also requires volunteer involvement of community members on leadership teams, and AOTE provides the opportunity for broader participation through its community-wide meetings and potlucks. Other venues for direct participation include the Village Wellness Committee Team and the Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat Discipline Committee.

- The Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat Discipline Plan was drafted in 1997 by a discipline committee that included representatives of the community, staff, and school. The proposed plan was reviewed and approved by the Quinhagak Advisory School Board after a review by school staff, parents, and students.
- Some family members participate in less formal ways through volunteer work in their children's classroom or as chaperones on trips. Others contribute through efforts in their own homes (e.g., providing a quiet place for children to study, reading with and to children, reviewing homework assignments with them). In 1997, the school identified 15 initiatives designed to promote increased parent, family and community involvement and participation in the school. There were 119 different volunteers and 1,500 hours of volunteer service in 1997–98.
- School policies related to the use of the school building also support a community and school partnership. The gymnasium often serves as a central gathering place for several different types of community functions (e.g., hosting a community potlatch, holding local and regional basketball events, for proms and other dances, and for celebrating students' graduation).

Summary Comments

This section provides observations and summary comments regarding (a) factors that have contributed to the community of Quinhagak making the choices it has for its school; (b) factors that have enabled Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat to implement new and self-determined educational priorities; (c) challenges that people of Quinhagak face in their efforts to narrow the gap between school and community and to increase student academic achievement.

Factors that have contributed to Quinhagak's decision to use Yup'ik as the language of instruction, develop and require a Yup'ik Life Skills curriculum for high-school students, and provide increased opportunities for parents and other community members to participate in teaching and learning activities:

- The people of Quinhagak strongly believe in the importance of their young people learning through and about Yup'ik values and beliefs, as is evident in the mission statement in their AOTE plan. The people of Quinhagak continue to use the Yup'ik language as their primary language for communication.
- The people of Quinhagak have demonstrated an ability to assume leadership positions at a local level. There is strong confirmation of the community's commitment to self governance and an interest and willingness to assume responsibility and control in their village, as evidenced through their new tribal government initiatives as well as in matters directly related to schooling and to education.
- The people of Quinhagak have sufficient numbers of Yup'ik-speaking certified teachers to implement their community-set goals in their school.
- The opportunity to use and integrate their Yup'ik language and culture is supported by their school district. LKSD is the only district in the state that provides its local sites with the option to choose what type of bilingual program it desires for its children.

Factors that have enabled Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat to implement new, self-determined educational priorities:

- Quinhagak is one of only a few rural communities in the state that has such a high percent of local, college-graduated, certified teachers who speak the language of the community, and a principal who is a member of the community.
- The AOTE process was initiated at a time when the community was receptive and ready for a grassroots effort that allowed for input and participation from a wider range of people than other previous efforts. AOTE in Quinhagak was shaped by a larger and more diverse group of people than some of the previous educational plans, and it was a bottom-up effort, rather than a top-down mandate.

- Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat has been supported in its efforts by the Lower Kuskokwim School District (through bilingual program options, bilingual training for teachers and aides, preparation of Yup'ik materials and Yup'ik-based theme curriculum, summer institutions for Yup'ik curriculum development, hiring processes that give priority to Yup'ik teachers when other qualifications are equal, and strong and consistent career ladder development programs).
- There are a now a number of current statewide systemic reform efforts that complement and support many of Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat's priorities (e.g., the National Science Foundation's Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, the Annenberg Foundation's Alaska Rural Challenge Grant, and the development of new Alaska Native teacher associations). These initiatives are designed to help integrate Alaska Native ways of knowing and teaching into school systems.

Challenges facing the people of Quinhagak in their efforts to narrow the gap between school and community and to increase student academic achievement:

- The need to continue to increase student learning for all K–12 students to meet both Yup'ik standards and the standards of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. (Evidence of new efforts in this area include a district policy that requires 180 student-contact days; the continued use and integration of multiple types of assessments, including performance assessments; the recent funding of a federal grant in Quinhagak for after-school and summer academic programs; and journal exchanges between students and parents.)
- The need to find increased means to support the academic and social needs of high-school students, particularly since the passage of legislation requiring a successful score on a statewide test in order to receive a high-school diploma, starting in the year 2002.. The need to continue to provide guidance and follow-up services for young adults who choose to leave high school before graduating.
- The immediate and critical need to prepare more Yup'ik-speaking teachers who are qualified and certified so that the current programs can be maintained and can continue to grow. Historical data provides clear and convincing evidence that without career ladder support *and* a university that is willing to work on a long-term

Factors that have contributed to Quinhagak's decision to use Yup'ik as the language of instruction, develop and require a Yup'ik Life Skills curriculum for high-school students, and provide increased opportunities for parents and other community members to participate in teaching and learning activities:

- The people of Quinhagak strongly believe in the importance of their young people learning through and about Yup'ik values and beliefs, as is evident in the mission statement in their AOTE plan. The people of Quinhagak continue to use the Yup'ik language as their primary language for communication.
- The people of Quinhagak have demonstrated an ability to assume leadership positions at a local level. There is strong confirmation of the community's commitment to self governance and an interest and willingness to assume responsibility and control in their village, as evidenced through their new tribal government initiatives as well as in matters directly related to schooling and to education.
- The people of Quinhagak have sufficient numbers of Yup'ik-speaking certified teachers to implement their community-set goals in their school.
- The opportunity to use and integrate their Yup'ik language and culture is supported by their school district. LKSD is the only district in the state that provides its local sites with the option to choose what type of bilingual program it desires for its children.

Factors that have enabled Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat to implement new, self-determined educational priorities:

- Quinhagak is one of only a few rural communities in the state that has such a high percent of local, college-graduated, certified teachers who speak the language of the community, and a principal who is a member of the community.
- The AOTE process was initiated at a time when the community was receptive and ready for a grassroots effort that allowed for input and participation from a wider range of people than other previous efforts. AOTE in Quinhagak was shaped by a larger and more diverse group of people than some of the previous educational plans, and it was a bottom-up effort, rather than a top-down mandate.

- Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat has been supported in its efforts by the Lower Kuskokwim School District (through bilingual program options, bilingual training for teachers and aides, preparation of Yup'ik materials and Yup'ik-based theme curriculum, summer institutions for Yup'ik curriculum development, hiring processes that give priority to Yup'ik teachers when other qualifications are equal, and strong and consistent career ladder development programs).
- There are a now a number of current statewide systemic reform efforts that complement and support many of Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat's priorities (e.g., the National Science Foundation's Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, the Annenberg Foundation's Alaska Rural Challenge Grant, and the development of new Alaska Native teacher associations). These initiatives are designed to help integrate Alaska Native ways of knowing and teaching into school systems.

Challenges facing the people of Quinhagak in their efforts to narrow the gap between school and community and to increase student academic achievement:

- The need to continue to increase student learning for all K–12 students to meet both Yup'ik standards and the standards of the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative. (Evidence of new efforts in this area include a district policy that requires 180 student-contact days; the continued use and integration of multiple types of assessments, including performance assessments; the recent funding of a federal grant in Quinhagak for after-school and summer academic programs; and journal exchanges between students and parents.)
- The need to find increased means to support the academic and social needs of high-school students, particularly since the passage of legislation requiring a successful score on a statewide test in order to receive a high-school diploma, starting in the year 2002. The need to continue to provide guidance and follow-up services for young adults who choose to leave high school before graduating.
- The immediate and critical need to prepare more Yup'ik-speaking teachers who are qualified and certified so that the current programs can be maintained and can continue to grow. Historical data provides clear and convincing evidence that without career ladder support *and* a university that is willing to work on a long-term

basis with rural and Alaska Native populations to provide relevant, flexible, and field-based teacher preparation programs, the state of Alaska will never come close to having a percent of Alaska Native teachers that is representative of the Alaska Native student enrollment.

- The need to recognize and openly deal with both the benefits and ongoing challenges of living and working in a cross-cultural context. The Quinhagak school is a place that has put into practice what many rural communities have only imagined. Half of the school's teaching staff is Yup'ik, the language of instruction for students for four elementary years is Yup'ik, and the school's environment is one that is truly bilingual, with Yup'ik and English used by the large majority of students and staff. In addition, the school has a relatively stable non-Native staff, with less teacher turnover than in many other sites. The extra energy demanded of teachers, staff, and students who work hard to be knowledgeable about and respectful toward people who are different from themselves must be recognized and supported if we intend to develop school environments where children of all cultural, linguistic, and geographic backgrounds can be successful.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

Although outsiders typically think of and refer to "the school" and "the community" and "the government" as separate entities, in Quinhagak they are in fact all closely intertwined (even though a flow chart might not show them as directly related) because the *people* who manage and make decisions about and within these units frequently share responsibilities across all of them. With 550 people in 125 households in Quinhagak and nearly 50 adults employed by the school and 140 students enrolled in the school, every family is directly connected to the school and to almost all community associations in some way. Efforts to keep community and school issues separate here are artificial, and the large majority of Quinhagak people who arrive for work at Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat do not have the option to simply pack their thoughts about subsistence, sport fishermen, or the IRA tribal council in a backpack and leave it on their snowmachine as they enter the school each morning.

Any real and sustained efforts at school reform must have a built-in organizational structure that requires the school to be responsible to the community. Based on the Quinhagak experience, we can conclude that despite nearly a century of political, economic, social, and educational efforts to change the language, customs, subsistence patterns, and overall lifestyle of the people of Quinhagak, it is clearly evident that a decision has been made in recent years by the majority of Quinhagak citizens to "stand their ground" as they make a serious effort to put into practice beliefs related to local control that have only been talked about in the past.

Closing the Gap:
Education and Change in New Stuyahok

Jerry Lipka
University of Alaska Fairbanks

"Closing the Gap: Education and Change in New Stuyahok" speaks directly to the reform efforts underway in Southwest Region Schools (SWRS) and the village of New Stuyahok. Without doubt, SWRS and the New Stuyahok school and community have made gains in improving student achievement, most notably a marked increase in the number of students attending postsecondary schooling and college. However, while major steps have been made in closing the gap between educational possibilities and attainment, a number of persistent and perennial educational problems persist. Among these problems is rapid staff turnover, creating an unstable educational environment (culture of the school) in terms of the relationship between school and community, between teachers and their students, and between teachers and the district's policies. More recently, declines in state revenues have hampered efforts at sustaining educational reform, reflected in an increase in teacher turnover. Therefore, this change process conjures an image of an "S" curve, indicating the cyclical and sometimes uneasy nature of change in this school/community context.

Beginning the Process: Closing the Gap

Southwest Region Schools and the New Stuyahok school and community began Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) in 1992. This resulted from funding by the Meyer Memorial Trust that began strategic and long-term planning within the school district. AOTE was established, in part, to close the educational gap between school and community. This gap has been well documented in the literature on education in Alaska, and the following highlights some of the more important gaps between:

- educational attainment and achievement
- scores on standardized tests and national and state averages
- numbers of students starting postsecondary schooling and completion rates
- trust between school and community
- local participation, planning, and decision-making in issues affecting school and community

The present case study, 1997–1999, documents the long-term effects of AOTE, since this study was conducted a number of years after the implementation process.

Research Methods

The data collection methods included observations, participation in the planning, and attending school and community meetings on setting and assessing AOTE-related goals. Also, a wide array of data was collected from the school district: teacher turnover rates, school district surveys, and interviews with teachers and students. Meetings, interviews, and informal discussions with community members also occurred. One major limitation of this study is that the present research does not include observing classrooms in progress, and therefore no correlation can be made between classroom practice and academic excellence nor classroom practice and the implementation of the AOTE New Stuyahok goal of bilingualism.

The Setting and AOTE Process

The New Stuyahok school and community, approximately 55 miles north of Dillingham, is located on the Nushagak River. The village's year-round population is approximately 98% Yup'ik Eskimo. Most of the inhabitants continue to participate in subsistence activities during the winter and commercial fish during the summer. Most of the adults in the community speak Yup'ik as their first language, while almost of all of the school-aged children are English-first speakers. The first school was built in the early 1950s. Many of the community members active in educational matters are graduates of the New Stuyahok school. The K–12 school today has approximately 150 students.

AOTE established district and village leadership teams that began the process of bridging the gap between school and community. These teams met with local community members, teachers, students, elders, and principals. Through this collaborative approach to planning, the New Stuyahok school and community established two major goals: postsecondary success and increased bilingualism. Regular and ongoing meetings were held in New Stuyahok. The leadership of Rod Mebius, former principal, and Margie Hasting, local teacher, are noteworthy, since these two individuals have been with the AOTE process from its inception, including the present study.

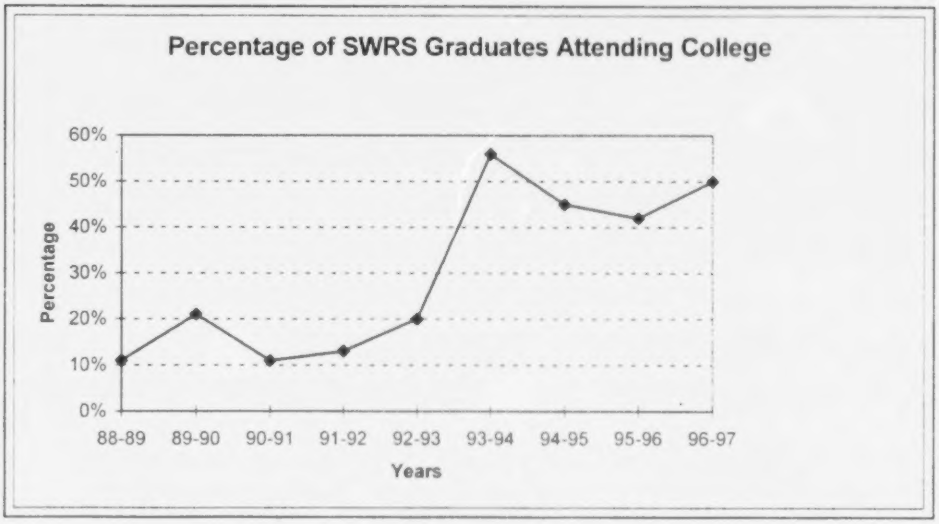
Major Findings: Has the Gap Been Closed?

AOTE's process of bringing school and community together has increased community voice and involvement in schooling. A rather remarkable change has occurred in the postsecondary success of New Stuyahok's students. A variety of test scores, some of them standardized tests, have also improved.

Yet school improvement is a complex phenomenon having also to do with increased educational attainment, familiarity with schooling, and increased English language fluency by villagers. Rapid teacher turnover, in particular, appears to undermine the district's long-term goals and action plans. However, local teachers (meaning those that are from the region, those that are married, and those who have made SWRS their career placement) play a critical role in bridging the gap between school and community. In addition, long-term service by staff provides stability to the school's culture. Efforts on the part of the SWRS district to involve the New Stuyahok community in setting goals, planning, and evaluating appear to have improved communication and stabilized the school. However, this increase in community expectations of and for improved communication led to renewed doubts when it was perceived that the school was "not listening." Efforts at increasing communication and trust need to continue in order to more fully meet school and community goals. The following sections expand upon these highlights from the case study.

Postsecondary Success

Through the AOTE process, the school district initiated a multipronged approach to improving students' academic and postsecondary success. Among them was the establishment of an itinerant cadre of high-school teachers who taught within their subject matter expertise. They hired a transition counselor to smooth the transition between high school and postsecondary schooling. Also, policy changes were made and implemented at the district and board level that allowed these changes to occur. Superintendent of schools, Don Evans stated, "AOTE gets credit for changing the view of what is the mission of SWRS, expanding it to include college. Because the view changed to include postsecondary success, SWRS allocated resources. We got additional money through grants and were able to pay attention to our kids when they were away at college." The chart below illustrates the point that superintendent Evans made that by changing policy and applying resources to postsecondary success, starting in 1992–93, there was a substantial increase in the percentages of SWRS students attending college. This increase, starting in 1993–94, is more than double the percentage of students attending college in each of the previous five years.



Academic Success

In addition to success in the number of students attending college and other postsecondary institutions, the following were also shown to have markedly improved: ratio of highest-to-lowest quartile scores on standardized achievement tests, ACT scores on writing assessments, and student achievement. There has been a steady increase in the competency scores for the district between 1993 and 1997. In language arts, for example, there has been a dramatic increase in competency test scores for all grades, culminating in 1997 when the desired expectations were met or surpassed. Similarly, there has been a steady increase in math, with a dip in 1995–96 scores but a substantial increase in competency scores in the 1996–97 school year.

Bilingualism

The goal of bilingualism continues to be supported by the community, and it is one of the two major goals supported by the AOTE process. However, this has been a more difficult goal to achieve. The community and the school need to continue to plan and evaluate their goals, strategies, plans, and implementation processes concerning this goal. Further, this goal needs to be clarified in terms of its desired outcomes, from more Yup'ik speakers to a less ambitious goal as an appreciation of the Yup'ik language and culture.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Perennial Problem: Rapid Teacher Turnover Rates

The district, fully cognizant of the rapid teacher turnover rate, has established leadership teams and other ways of continuing a dialogue between school and community to stabilize schooling. Teacher turnover continues to mitigate the current plans, including the AOTE process. For example, in New Stuyahok at the end of the 1997 academic year, 33% of the teaching staff turned over. Further, those teachers remaining, particularly from outside of the region (and in most cases outside of Alaska) have only been in New Stuyahok for one or two years. Obviously, this stresses processes like AOTE, since all of these new teachers were neither part of the original AOTE reform efforts nor even part of the present study when it was first initiated. This stresses those members of the school and community who were part of the original process and places the burden directly on them to ensure that the process continues.

Teacher turnover rates at New Stuyahok are commensurate with the rest of the district. The preponderance of teacher turnover takes place during the first three to four years of stay for new teachers in the district. Of these teachers, those from outside the region are more than twice as likely to leave the district after three or four years of teaching than those from within the district. This is particularly troublesome, since it takes approximately two to three years to get to know the school, the curriculum, the students, and the community. At the very time that the initial investment in new teachers has been recouped, 60 to 70% of them will leave the district. Despite these statistics, analysis of the teacher turnover rates also has a silver lining. The number of Alaskan teachers who stay with the district for more than four years is considerably higher than outside teachers. The number of outside teachers who remain in the district for their entire career is approximately 8 to 12% of all outside teachers. Also, the non-certified staff, teacher aides and bilingual staff, have the most years of tenure and represent a stable core in each school. Here is the potential for long-term stability concerning policy changes and efforts at reform.

A Concluding Thought

The question is not if the AOTE has been successful but can it be sustained? To sustain reform in SWRS is going to take additional measures by the central school district administration as well as on the part of the community and long-term teachers. Since the administration has been interested in providing the opportunity and responsibility for on-site management, it is the opinion of this writer that by working with a cadre of career teachers (those who choose to work in the district for their entire careers), a cadre of community members, and long-term staff, stability and reform can occur. By a concerted effort to include these groups in planning, training, and hence preparing them to become local decision makers, the district could more smoothly continue its policies aimed at reform: being responsive to both the culture and language of the local community, and to high academic standards. Despite the considerable success that SWRS has demonstrated in the last few years, most notably in the number of its graduates attending postsecondary schooling, to continue to close the gap between the school and community and between the students' potential and present achievement will require even more creative responses on the part of the district. This may require changes that are bolder and less cosmetic in terms of power relations, by increasing the role of on-site management in curriculum, budget, staffing, and planning. This goal is expressed by the superintendent, but needs to be more firmly implemented to allow for the next round of reform. Otherwise, decreases in state spending on education and increased emphasis on new state standards may well shift school decision making away from local concerns.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

Creating sustainable change requires bold and broad steps. The perennial issue of rapid teacher turnover is a direct obstacle to reform efforts underway in many rural Alaskan communities. In general, teacher turnover creates a chaotic culture of schooling where new teachers must adapt and become acquainted with the village, the students, and the curriculum. Simultaneously, the community must re-educate yet another cadre of teachers. This means that many teachers do not become sufficiently familiar with the school and school district's philosophy and curriculum, nor sufficiently acquainted with the community to effectively bridge local knowledge and school knowledge. In addition to working more closely with long-term teachers, teacher aides, and community members, more needs to occur to stabilize the culture of schooling so that academic success is not just a short-term goal but is actualized in the long-term. One way out of this dilemma for rural Alaskan schools is for the state to commit considerably more resources to help communities "grow their own" teachers. From the data collected in this study and from previous experience in rural Alaska, local teachers tend to spend their careers in their home community or other rural communities. Having more local teaches who spend many more years in a district is a direct antidote to the cycle of chaos that has permeated too much of the Alaskan educational scene since its colonial inception. Teachers who are developed from within the community stay longer than those who come from outside. They are already knowledgeable about the children and the community, and they bring these advantages to teaching. Further, investing inservice resources on teachers who will make teaching in rural Alaska their careers raises the possibility of moving from stability to quality. Stability of staff allows for the slow accumulation of wisdom associated with practice, which is foundational to having a quality educational program.

Long-term change requires a number of major shifts in state policy. First, the University of Alaska needs to become much proactive in its educational outreach programs to recruit, train, and graduate local teachers. In fact, the opposite has been happening during this past decade. Second, at the level of the state legislature more money needs to be put into teacher education and a re-thinking of the so-called standards movement that now includes a post-baccalaureate degree to become a teacher and the testing of teachers on a paper and pencil test before licensure is granted. These structural changes will further slow the pace for recruiting, preparing, and graduating local teachers. Despite the standard movement's ideal of having higher academic standards, there is already evidence in Alaska and elsewhere that this will result in teacher shortages. This means that some rural districts will be forced to hire more teachers to teach out of their area of expertise, that some positions will go unfilled, and that teachers leaving rural areas may actually accelerate. If this is true, then the standards movement will contribute inadvertently to fueling the dynamics that lead to a culture of school chaos over stability. Third, preparing and developing local teachers and supporting them through their careers is another way to both stabilize the culture of schooling while bolstering the academic climate. This creates possibilities for academic excellence in the long-term.

A Long Journey:
Alaska Onward to Excellence in Yupiit/Tuluksak Schools

Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley
Ray Barnhardt
University of Alaska Fairbanks

The Yupiit case study documents the Alaska Onward to Excellence school improvement process as it has evolved in the Yupiit School District (YSD) and the village of Tuluksak since it was initiated in 1992, including the impact it has had on the educational experiences of students.

The Yupiit School District consists of three Yupiaq villages (Akiachak, Akiak and Tuluksak) on the lower Kuskokwim river of southwest Alaska. Before 1976, the elementary schools in the three communities were administered by the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Alaska State Operated School System. With the establishment of regional school districts and the creation of village high schools in the late 1970's, the villages joined together to form the Yupiit Nation and began to explore ways to run their own schools. In 1985, the three villages withdrew their schools from the regional district in which they had been placed by the state and petitioned to form the Yupiit School District, through which they hoped "to ensure the endurance and growth of the Yupiit culture and societies for both present and future generations." The YSD School Board was determined to build an educational program that would take into account Yupiit interests, while at the same time preparing students to succeed in the world beyond the Yupiit Nation.

Following is a summary profile of each of the three Yupiit schools at the time of the initiation of the AOTE process:

Akiachak	Akiak	Tuluksak
First sch. estab.: 1930	First sch. estab.: 1911	First sch. estab.: 1930
Elem. students: 93	Elem. students: 61	Elem. students: 81
Elem. teachers: 7	Elem. teachers: 4	Elem. teachers: 5
Sec. students: 45	Sec. students: 14	Sec. students: 26
Secondary teachers: 7*	Secondary teachers: 6*	Secondary teachers: 6*

*secondary teachers include part-time instructors for certain subject areas

Alaska Onward to Excellence in the Yupiit Schools

In October 1992, notices began to appear in the communities of Akiachak, Akiak, and Tuluksak announcing "The First Onward to Excellence Meeting" to be held in each of the local schools, hosted by the Yupiit School District AOTE leadership team. The announcement in Tuluksak indicated that "it is important that Elders and community members come and help plan for the future of their children." These meetings were the first of what became a series of well-attended community gatherings over the next several years, focusing on involving elders, parents, students and teachers in the remaking of the YSD educational programs through what was characterized as "not just another project, but a long journey."

The initial community meetings focused peoples attention on identifying and articulating the particular values and beliefs that they wished to pass on to the next generation, out of which a mission statement for the school district and a set of student goals were formulated. The following mission and student goals were adopted by the YSD Board in May, 1993:

> The mission of the Yupiit School District and community is to ensure that all students master the basic skills, develop self-confidence, become self-reliant, possess knowledge of traditional Yup'ik ways, become fluent in Yup'ik and English languages, establish healthy life styles, become lifelong learners, and succeed in any environment.
>
> **Goal A**: Know the way of life and history of Yup'ik families and what is important to know from the outside world as a result of living and functioning in both cultures. Students shall become the best educated Yup'ik hunters, fishers, and gatherers in the world.
>
> **Goal B**: Be prepared for further education and work.
>
> **Goal C**: Have respect and a positive attitude toward life and learning, school, self and a harmonious community.
>
> **Goal D**: Be a law abiding citizens regardless of where one lives.
>
> **Goal E**: Be able to read, write and speak both the Yup'ik and English languages.

Implementing the Yupiit School District Mission and Goals

Once the AOTE process had helped the Yupiit School District establish a direction for itself, the next step was to implement the goals that would achieve the mission adopted by the board. Following a series of meetings, each village selected one of the goals on which to focus its school improvement efforts. At the same time, they articulated several areas of concern that would need to be addressed to achieve the YSD mission:

- Given high staff turnover, we need a plan and direction (mission and goals) to have some stability over time. But there is some staff resistance to full community partnership. There are some principals and teachers who don't want the community setting the direction.
- The decline in student performance at elementary and high school levels is a concern as well as the peer pressure to *not* succeed (doing well in school is not "cool").
- High expectations and accountability. Teachers need to set high expectations and standards and people need to be accountable for results (e.g., all kindergarten students will perform up to grade level). But accountability does not mean people losing their jobs. It means people taking responsibility for the failure to meet a high standard and making adjustments next year.
- Importance of parent/home support for student success in postsecondary school. We need to define in specific terms the kind of support from families that will help young people succeed in college. We need to move beyond talking only generally about parent support and define and communicate what that means.
- There is a tension between the Western model of education and the Native priority on language and culture. This becomes a problem with high staff turnover (many teachers discover they can't handle village life) and there is a need to continually educate new teachers. This means that time must be found for staff development.
- Since Native language and culture are fast disappearing, how to approach bilingual education is a controversial issue. Can we reach agreement on what it takes to achieve fluency in both English and Yup'ik? People do not yet agree on the best way

to do this.

- A major issue is how to integrate AOTE with ongoing district activities. If AOTE is to succeed as a long-term improvement process, it must become part of the way districts and schools do business, rather than an add-on project.

By the third year of the project there was enough momentum built up in each village that the changes that were being implemented in the schools were becoming noticeable. Student attendance began to show improvement, parent and Elder participation was on the rise, technology was being integrated into the schools in new ways, training in new curricular areas was being provided, and in general the school and community were showing signs of working more closely together. A committee began to compile all the information that had been accumulated on various aspects of the Yup'ik culture and organize it into a coherent cultural heritage curriculum. As a theme for the work they had undertaken, they adopted the statement, "let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children," and with the support of the Elders, community members and the teaching staff, they produced a seasonally-organized "Circle of Life" bilingual and cultural heritage curriculum outline.

The formulation of the curriculum embodied in the YSD Bilingual and Cultural Heritage Program clearly captured the mission and goals adopted by the district and communities. It also obviously required a closer working relationship between the schools and community, with the expertise required to implement the curriculum shared by members of the community as well as the teaching staff. While everyone recognized that it would take considerable additional work to effectively integrate the Yup'ik components into the curriculum, the district now had some concrete areas on which to focus its effort.

Findings: The Impact of AOTE in the Yupiit School District

While AOTE has not been the only factor impacting education in the Yupiit School District since 1992, it has been a consistent presence and has provided a unifying theme (mission) and direction (goals) for the schools. However, there has been considerable ambivalence regarding the purpose of education as reflected in the curriculum offerings and teaching practices in the schools. While everyone agrees on the need for the school to prepare the students for life in both the local and global context, there has been little consistency in how this is addressed on a day-to-day basis. There are bits and pieces of each, but no cumulative, integrated approach that helps students (or teachers and parents) sort through the confusion and ambiguities involved.

By 1996, the Yupiit School District board was concerned that many aspects of the district mission and goals that had been established through the AOTE process were not evident in the schools. Teachers were continuing to teach the way they were taught, and the problem extended to the whole school, not just to the Yup'ik cultural program. The district sponsored several additional meetings with school staff and community members as well as with invited experts in the educational field, in which they reaffirmed the critical importance of making changes for the betterment and empowerment of the Yupiat people. This gave an increased degree of community voice to the people, and a renewed commitment was made under the banner of "*Kitugiyaraq*—the way to restore, to reform."

As a result, the Yupiit School District obtained federal funding to initiate a curriculum development process that would: "combine traditional Yup'ik customs and practices and modern communications technology to develop an educational curriculum that will prepare Yup'ik students for the 21st century. Student performance is expected to improve because their educational curriculum will be designed to have strong roots in Yup'ik culture and the local environment." Included in this curriculum effort is the incorporation of methods and approaches that reflect "Native ways of knowing," including the following suggested teaching strategies:

1. Use of local experts, elders, and parents
    - Consider taking small groups of students to the elders
    - Be aware that elders have a different timetable
2. Use of local values
3. Use of observation of the environment
4. Use of hands-on experience, which includes observing, practicing, applying, and demonstration
5. Use of sharing knowledge and teamwork

6. Sensitivity and use of seasonal activities and cycles
7. Use of Yup'ik language
8. Use of indigenous technologies and knowledge

There is an obvious thread of continuity as the AOTE process has evolved into "Yup'ik Education for the 21st Century." The new curriculum efforts are a direct reflection of the mission and goals of the Yupiit School District and are intended to address some of the frustrations and ambivalence associated with the earlier AOTE efforts. Each step on this "long journey" increases the confidence of the communities and district that their goals are achievable and the future of the children in their care is bright, as citizens of the Yupiit Nation and as citizens of the world.

In general, the people of the Yupiit Nation/Yupiit School District have viewed AOTE as being responsible for creating a high level of interest in the infusion of Yup'ik culture into the YSD curriculum, particularly on the part of community members. While there continue to be some significant differences of opinion regarding how to proceed in integrating the Yup'ik culture with the standard academic curriculum, the comment of one of the teachers that their task is to help students "walk in two worlds with one spirit" best signifies the direction in which the district is heading. For everyone involved, there is a growing recognition that the school cannot achieve its goals in isolation from the surrounding community, and that in fact it is a vital part of the health and well-being of the whole community.

A review of the original goals set out for the Alaska Onward to Excellence project at its inception in 1992 indicates that the effort has been remarkably successful at maintaining its focus and making a significant difference in the schools that have participated. The Yupiit School District has taken on some of the most intractable problems facing rural schools in Alaska and has begun to develop a successful model for improving performance of rural Alaskan schools and students. As a result of AOTE, Yupiit students are showing a greater interest in school and are beginning to show improvement in their academic performance as well as their sense of who they are and where they come from; Yupiit schools are working more closely with the parents and communities they serve; the Yupiit School District has the beginnings of a new curriculum through which it can better integrate the Yup'ik and Western knowledge systems it is called upon to transmit; and the Yupiit communities have enlarged their capacity and taken on the responsibility to define their own futures. Few school improvement efforts have achieved as much.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

Alaska Onward to Excellence has been a significant contributor to the school reform efforts of the Yupiit School District as the district has struggled to fulfill the promise of "local control" that was the basis for its creation 20 years ago. Though AOTE has not been the only vehicle for reform in the YSD schools and communities over those two formative decades, it has played a key role from which some important lessons can be drawn to guide other schools and communities in their efforts to establish "culturally relevant" educational programs for their students. Following are some of the highlights from the YSD AOTE exercise that can provide guidance to inform the school reform efforts of rural educators elsewhere.

In general, the YSD journey described in this case study reflects a high level of engagement with and commitment to the role of the community in shaping the educational focus of the school. This was accomplished by promoting the transformation of the schools into community-oriented institutions striving to meet the educational needs of the people they serve. To do so required broadening the scope of educational planning beyond the narrow academic mission to incorporate the nurturing of personal and cultural well-being as well. Yet, the task of reconciling the competing notions of educational need between those oriented toward local concerns aimed at strengthening the subsistence culture and identity vs. those driven by external considerations such as jobs and academic pursuits is far from resolved. For the people in leadership roles at YSD, however, these issues are no longer perceived as either/or propositions. They have concluded that their children must acquire the knowledge and skills to actively participate in both worlds, as clearly indicated in their mission statement.

While the content of the mission statement (presented earlier) was important in guiding subsequent school improvement efforts, probably even more important was the dialogue that was generated between the school staff and the community members in the process of developing the statement and its related goals. As one administrator put it, the AOTE exercise helped to "head everyone in the same direction." For many community members, it was the first time they felt their views mattered and had an impact on the direction in which the school was heading. Much of the credit for creating a climate of open exchange between the district representatives and community members goes to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory personnel, Bob Blum and Tom Olson, who served not only as technical experts, but as neutral third-party facilitators who made sure that all points of view were heard. As a consequence of the widespread and meaningful participation of people from all segments of the communities, as well as attention to the local variations on issues and circumstances, the mission statement that was eventually adopted instilled a high degree of ownership throughout the district and became a ubiquitous presence and reminder on bulletin boards, in newsletters and at meetings throughout the villages. It really did serve to "head everyone in the same direction."

Another important ingredient throughout the YSD AOTE effort was consistent leadership and support at the local level. The continuous involvement of several key school board members insured that the school improvement process was cumulative and that it was deeply imbedded in the communities and in the district decision-making processes. This was the basis for a smooth transition in leadership when the original superintendent left the district at the end of the third year, and was reflected in the commitment from the board to continue the AOTE effort beyond the period of outside funding support. As one board member put it, for the first time the district did not have to go back to square one with the departure of a superintendent, but could continue building on its past efforts. The outside funding from Meyer Memorial Trust was also crucial to the success of the project in the early stages, because it provided an incentive to bring people together from across the schools and communities who otherwise probably would not have entered into the dialogue that ensued.

The role of the local culture in the curriculum of rural schools can often be a fractious issue with differences of opinion between community members and school staff, as well as within communities themselves. As a result of participation in the AOTE process, the parents and school board members in YSD began to play an active role in the education of their children, both in and out of school. Education was defined as a community responsibility, with the school serving as one player, albeit a key one, in the process. Parents were called upon to become active participants and contribute their indigenous knowledge and expertise to the school as teachers. Students were expected to share what they have learned and demonstrate their skills to the community in appropriate ways. Through prolonged discussion involving all parties, AOTE was able to create a high level of interest in the infusion of Yup'ik culture throughout the YSD curriculum, particularly on the part of community members. This was the basis for the school improvement goals that were targeted by each of the villages, as well as much of the involvement that was generated from elders and community members.

While there continues to be some significant differences of opinion regarding how to proceed in integrating the Yup'ik culture with the standard academic curriculum, the comment of one of the teachers that their task is to help students "walk in two worlds with one spirit" best signifies the direction that has begun to emerge. For the majority of the teachers who originate from outside the communities and culture in which they are working, such a task poses a major challenge, but as a result of the AOTE dialogue they saw the need and were willing to make the effort. Instead of the community having to make all the accommodation to meet the imported expectations of the school, at least one teacher was encouraged that "the school is finding its way to the community." The YSD experience indicates that it is possible to approach the infusion of culturally appropriate content and practices into the curriculum through an integrative rather than an additive or supplementary approach. By carefully delineating the knowledge, skills and values students are to learn in culturally appropriate terms, and employing a variety of "teachers" who possess the necessary local and global cultural knowledge and perspectives, it is possible for a school district to provide an integrated educational program that builds on the local cultural environment and indigenous knowledge base as a foundation for learning about the larger world beyond. Learning about ones own cultural heritage and community should not be viewed as supplanting opportunities to learn about others, but rather as providing an essential infrastructure through which all other learning is constructed. Clearly, this would not have happened without the kind of extensive school-community interaction that AOTE fostered.

The feature of the Yupiit schools that has been most impacted as a result of the AOTE project is the learning process that students are experiencing. As a result of the infusion of Yup'ik cultural perspectives through the "Circle of Life" and EFG curriculum associated with the Bilingual and Cultural Heritage Program, everyone in the communities has the potential to take on the role of teacher, every place is a potential classroom, and every activity in the community constitutes a learning opportunity. From one of the teachers vantage point, the new curriculum provides an opportunity to move beyond the books and "apply knowledge to real life," while one of the parents sees it as a way to get beyond "testing our kids on what is not seen around them." From the perspective of one of the administrators, it means that "YSD would be last no more." For the people of YSD, being Yup'ik means a way of thinking, a way of seeing, a way of behaving, a way of doing things, and a way of relating to the world around them. The Yup'ik language is a basic element of their cultural identity and its meaning is shaped by the person speaking it and the context in which it is used. Subsistence is a way of life, defined by relationships to the land and all other life supported by it. Education must take all of these aspects of existence into account if it is to be truly culturally responsive. Although it is too early to determine the long-range impact of the new curriculum initiatives, the cultural report card, the esteem-building and language initiatives, and the active involvement of Yupiit community members in the education of their children, it is reassuring that the directions in which the Yupiit School District is moving to improve its schools is consistent with the emerging trends throughout the country to develop a closer working relationship between the schools and the communities they serve.

These and many other lessons can be gleaned from the experiences of the communities that make up the Yupiit School District in their efforts to accommodate two cultures in the schools. But most of those lessons are of little use to others unless they also possess the sense of cultural pride, dignity and determination that is reflected in the people of Akiachak, Akiak and Tuluksak. The impact of the AOTE project on schooling in YSD is best captured by the statement of a parent in summarizing the significance of the mission statement that had been adopted by the YSD board with a paraphrase of an old African adage: "It takes the whole village to educate a child." The villages of the Yupiit School District are making that adage a reality.

Community Voice and Educational Change: Aniak and Kalskag Villages

Bruce Miller
Jed W. Schwendiman
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Aniak village, home of the Kuspuk School District, is located 350 air miles west of Anchorage. Geographically, the school district is similar in size to the state of Maryland. It covers over 12,000 square miles and includes eight villages accessible only by air and river travel. The eight villages are all located along the mid-Kuskokwim River and stretch 120 miles from Lower Kalskag to Stony River. Most of the villages are comprised of 90 to 98% Native Yup'ik Eskimo people, with a total population of approximately 1,775 living in the school district area. Winters in the area are long and cold, with temperatures frequently below -50° F. Although short, summers can have temperatures occasionally in the 90° F range.

Over the years, the Kuspuk School District has engaged in a variety of efforts to improve learning for students. In October of 1996, the district initiated Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE). Although AOTE was introduced in all village schools, the focus of this study is on AOTE and other reform efforts in two villages: Aniak and Kalskag. These two villages were selected by the school district to participate in this case study research on educational reform and school changes in remote Alaska schools.

Aniak is an island surrounded by the Kuskokwim River. A noticeable feature of Aniak is the many dogs that residents use for recreation and racing, which serve as a reminder of older traditions. Local residents choose Aniak because it is seen as an inclusive place to live. Unlike many villages in the area, the population base in Aniak is often described as 50% Native and 50% non-Native. The Native culture is primarily Yup'ik Eskimo, but there are some residents that have kinship ties to other Alaskan Indian groups. Many of the children are from blended families where they grow up in two cultures. As a matter of fact, the high-school students proudly wear the name "Aniak Halfbreeds" as their mascot.

While Aniak is considered the "big city" by the residents of surrounding villages, its almost 600 people know that the big city remains far away. Aniak now has cable television, an airstrip long enough for small jets, some apartment houses, and several businesses. Native and regional organizations also reside in Aniak, giving it the illusion of a larger place. Aniak's role as a "hub" village masks its delicate economic stability. Commercial fishing and trapping used to provide significant and reliable sources of income. However, economic factors associated with changing market demands have reduced these industries to the point of unprofitability. The city and local governing groups are looking at ways to address work and income opportunities while preserving Aniak's quality of life. Currently, Aniak has an unemployment rate of 9.7%, low for most Alaska villages.

Kalskag is located about 30 air miles down the Kuskokwim River from Aniak. In winter, most travel to Kalskag is done by airplane, although all-terrain-vehicles, snowmachines, and trucks move along the river when it is frozen. Kalskag is really two different Yup'ik villages that were created in the 1940s when Catholic practitioners relocated to what is now called Upper Kalskag, and Russian Orthodox practitioners relocated two miles down river to what is now called Lower Kalskag. Upper and Lower Kalskag have populations of 184 and 392, respectively.

Each village has its own post office and local governing bodies. Although the village gives the impression of a place in transition, most residents have lived in the area with their extended families for many decades. The population has not only been stable but has been growing in recent years. At one time, each village had its own K–6 elementary school, but reorganization took place in the 1970s. Now Zackar Levi School serves 70 to 80 students in grades K–4 and is located in Lower Kalskag. Joseph and Olinga Gregory School enrolls 33 students in grades 5–6 and is located in Upper Kalskag. George Morgan Senior High School serves grades 7–12 and is located between the two villages.

Upper and Lower Kalskag share many of the same economic and social concerns of other rural Alaska schools. Over 70% of village livelihood comes from subsistence activities such as fishing, trapping, and hunting. Cash income is derived from public employment at the school, city, or clinic and from public assistance programs. Some commercial fishing and fire-fighting provide seasonal income. Unemployment runs between 25% and 37%.

Research Methods

To better understand how AOTE and other educational improvement and reform efforts have been implemented and sustained in the communities of Aniak and Kalskag, information was collected from a variety of sources including interviews, surveys, and document analysis. In addition, demographic data such as district size, school configurations, and poverty rates were collected, along with written documents such as grants, meeting notes from parent groups, advisory meeting notes, school board minutes, and minutes from AOTE improvement team meetings. Visits were conducted to each of the schools where informal observations were made and discussion held with various staff and students. Lastly, a key strategy that helped guide and inform data collection and analysis was the use of a community-based research team. The five-member team was chosen by the school district administration. Two team members were chosen to represent each village and one team member represented the district administration. Project staff provided ongoing training in a collaborative setting with research teams from each of the case study sites.

Major Findings

While Aniak and Kalskag are in many ways unique communities, this case study looked for similarities and contrasts across these two neighboring AOTE villages. Findings presented here relate to AOTE and the larger reform process, community voice, and student views of school and learning in the two communities. There were limited findings regarding student effects, given that the study took place during the early implementation of AOTE and because AOTE, as it turned out, was weakly implemented.

AOTE and the community voice it tries to foster started off strong in both villages, but quickly dropped away for a variety of reasons. District administrators and the local facilitators trained to implement AOTE said they believed in the model's principles, and people were very positive about AOTE in the beginning. However, it was extremely difficult to keep the process going. By year two of implementation in Aniak, the level of community turnout and school staff involvement was practically nonexistent. In Kalskag, the first meeting went well but following meetings died out. AOTE represented an opportunity to help transform the roles that community, parents, students, and staff play in improving learning for all students. The failure of this kind of approach to really get off the ground was due to several contextual factors and perhaps the fit of the model with village life, as discussed below.

Leadership

Historically, the Kuspuk School District had operated from a top-down management style that created relational conflicts between the formal school system and the community and between teachers and administrators within the school system. There are also deeper historical issues dating back to the days of boarding schools, when Alaska Native cultural values were usurped by the Western language and values implicit in the structure and operation of modern schools. AOTE was unable to overcome these historical forces despite its messages of community involvement and shared leadership. The AOTE process itself was also seen as too complicated and cumbersome by facilitators and others who were trained to implement the process, including having facilitators train leadership teams and the logistics of holding many community meetings within busy subsistence villages. In addition, community members felt unprepared and uninformed about AOTE. They were not sure what was expected of them, how the school decided to use the AOTE model, and what the AOTE model was really all about.

In both Aniak and Kalskag, AOTE was viewed as "another district mandate." Even with the many improved learning opportunities for students provided by the Kuspuk schools, there was evidence that leadership within the schools and the district have constrained community involvement through past policy and behaviors, although not with any malicious intent. In an effort to alter this historical pattern, the current superintendent sought to implement AOTE because of evidence coming from other Alaska districts that the model would provide a structure for meaningful involvement and community-level decision making. AOTE did make an important contribution in both Aniak and Kalskag by increasing the level of discussion and consensus about problems needing to be addressed. Some short-term progress was made in implementing an AOTE action plan, but the potential for AOTE to bring about long-term changes in how the district and schools operate to improve student learning has not been realized in Aniak and Kalskag.

Considering shared decision making as one aspect of community voice, decisions about budget, resource allocation, and educational innovations seem to be made primarily at the district level. The district does use a variety of advisory strategies to elicit the voice of the community and teachers, yet there is no site-based decision making. AOTE attempted to change this, but as indicated above, the process did not take hold. This means that the reform agenda continues to be centrally controlled, which often results in little understanding or support of educational innovations on the part of teachers, parents, other community members, and students.

Bringing Community Voice Into Education

Parents do want to be involved in their children's education, but they need help overcoming their lack of comfort in school settings. In Aniak and Kalskag, what worked best were personal contacts and relationship building between teachers and the home so that trust is built over time. Formal processes like the parent advisory committees and AOTE are less appealing to parents and present problems with scheduling and child care. The teachers interviewed who took the extra time to make phone calls and home visits were much more successful in building lasting relationships with their students' parents and in involving the parents in school activities.

Some progress has been made in Aniak and Kalskag in incorporating Native language and culture into education, but there is still a long way to go. Progress in the short term appears to have been made as demonstrated by the efforts of AOTE, improved hiring practices to bring in teachers who are more sensitive to Alaska Native culture, the implementation of a comprehensive literacy program, and the continued support of cultural curriculum opportunities such as Heritage Week, instruction in the Yup'ik language, and the Elder's Conference. Beyond incorporating cultural themes into education, efforts have also been made to link education to the local community and bring a "sense of place" into the curriculum.

Student Views of School

While both Aniak and Kalskag students rated their schools as being high quality as measured by satisfaction with school, reactions to teachers, and commitment to coursework (Quality of School Life Questionnaire), different student groups in the same school had different perceptions about school quality. The study found that in Aniak, male students consistently rated the school more positively than female students. In Kalskag, the gender difference was not found, but the eighth-grade class rated the quality of their school experience much lower than students did in other grades.

Overall, there was a wide variety of opinions of school and life in rural Alaska among Aniak and Kalskag students. Students said they enjoyed the small-town closeness and wilderness experiences in the two villages and felt that the school, especially in Kalskag, contributes to a sense of "family" as evidenced by close relationships between teachers and students. Of concern were student comments about school not being challenging enough, with most students believing that school should prepare them for college, the military, or other activities in the "outside world." Other students voiced concerns that schools should focus on local issues and need to prepare those students who will not leave rural Alaska.

Summary

Some positive educational changes have occurred for the students of Aniak and Kalskag, and teachers have tried to innovate in areas like portfolio assessment, using computers and technology for instruction, and bringing more Alaska Native cultural themes and activities into the curriculum. Yet these changes tend to be driven primarily by available funding and external grants, so they tend to come and go in a "boom or bust" cycle. These changes tend to be episodic rather than long-term or systemic, and the chances of these changes having a strong, positive impact on students is diminished.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

Because the Kuspuk School District was in the early stages of AOTE implementation when this study began, efforts were made to look at contextual variables that appear to help or hinder the implementation of systemic reforms. In other words, what conditions need to be in place in order for a systemic reform effort such as AOTE to produce positive outcomes for students? Second, how could AOTE be modified to better help villages make a real impact on student learning?

It is difficult for a community with a history of centralized power and decision making to suddenly make the transition to a reform model like AOTE, which stresses shared decision making, long-term community involvement, and a more systemic approach to selecting and implementing educational innovations. AOTE is more likely to succeed in a district where there is the culture and practice of shared decision making. The process by itself may not be enough to change the culture and historical ways of doing business from a top-down, community-advisory model of education to a true shared decision making model.

Context must be considered when designing strategies for systemic change. From an outsider perspective, educational reform efforts that have come and gone in Aniak and Kalskag (and maybe the school district in general) do not appear to come and go because of a lack of concern or desire for positive outcomes for children. They appear to be short lived because they disregard and in some cases dismiss local context. AOTE represents a case in point. Rather than learning how things worked at the local level, AOTE provided a process and activities that came from the outside, which was seen as being complicated and difficult to implement. Nevertheless, AOTE has not been a failure. People are thinking and talking more about reform issues and community needs in new ways. A number of contextual conditions emerged from this case study as being key for sustained success, which are outlined below.

Educational reformers from the outside must consider local context in several ways. First, reform efforts must try to support and extend caring, positive relationships among youth, parents, and community members. Many wonderful examples exist currently in the villages and need to be observed and understood, especially by new teachers just coming into the district. Second, reform efforts must attempt to understand how local knowledge and place can be used to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Third, someone representing district and state-level reform programs must stay connected with local communities so that local context is understood and considered in major educational decisions. This involvement needs to be perceived in the village as an advocacy role for the local place. Finally, the different voices and viewpoints must be given the opportunity for meaningful input, which is an underlying principle of AOTE.

Within the context of these four conditions, how could AOTE be improved to better address the needs of educational reform in remote villages such as Aniak and Kalskag? The AOTE structures (i.e., leadership team and research teams) are designed to give voice at the local level, ensure two-way communication, and allow for adjustments as the process is implemented. However, most people involved in these roles are volunteers and have other duties within their community, school, or district. This tends to overstress participants and create feelings of another district add-on to existing work. In villages such as Aniak and Kalskag, where people spend a large portion of their time involved in meeting subsistence needs, time given to reform activities must yield immediate and valued results to hold interest. Much up-front work needs to be done in order to help people find time and create buy-in and ownership for the process so that it becomes the center of improvement work rather than an add-on to numerous existing activities. AOTE might be improved if it began with a core group of motivated individuals from each village who spend time identifying existing community networks and individuals who can positively influence the community and school. They would engage these people in a dialogue about the school and community in terms of their work. In other words, learn what they do, discover their interests and desires, and build from their ideas for supporting and helping youth. This focus is aimed at building relationships, ownership, and common ground for improvement decisions. Some of the positive examples observed in classrooms in which teachers go out of their ways to demonstrate genuine care for students and an understanding of local context and place have much to teach about how reform and improvement can occur in village life. Moreover, such a focus builds on local assets and resources as opposed to building on problems and needs.

The training-of-trainers model used by AOTE in Aniak and Kalskag (i.e., training facilitators to train village leadership teams) sought to use local people as a conduit to build the desired relationships within the villages. But AOTE participants did not seem to understand the complexity of the facilitator's role in building a village support base for the reform process. It might have been better to have worked directly with the entire village team to ensure common understanding and broaden the base of decision makers. Moreover, if the leadership team represented individuals drawn from key networks within the village, the process would have created more opportunity to penetrate into the fabric of village life.

Lastly, successful reform efforts need to be given priority status and remain visible throughout the school and community to avoid the episodic, "boom or bust" reform cycle. People need to know about the purposes of a school-community reform process, believe it will help their children, and see people of social and political power as its advocates. When viewed as another program, added onto an already full plate of activities, the probability of success is severely diminished.

Creating a Strong, Healthy Community: Ella B. Vernetti School, Koyukuk

Beth Leonard
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Koyukuk, or Meneelghaadze' T'oh as it is referred to by the *tl'eeyegge hut'aane'* Athabascans of this area, is a small village located at the mouth of the Koyukuk River. The population of approximately 131 people varies from year to year, often dependent on job opportunities in the area or the more urban areas of Alaska. It is difficult to summarize the rich history of this area and the complex connections among the neighboring Athabascan villages. The Koyukon people of this area have a history which extends at least 6,000 years into the past, during which they maintained trade routes and traveled extensively within the larger Athabascan region and also into the neighboring Inupiaq regions.

Current widespread economic, social, and political concerns among the Native people of Alaska include the maintenance of subsistence rights, including management of natural resources by federal and/or state agencies, reduced state government assistance to needy families ("welfare to workfare"), and the widespread misconceptions about state-funded rural education that have resulted in a new statewide funding formula, reducing funding for many of Alaska's rural school districts. Another specific concern of the people of this area is the presence of hazardous waste in their environment: chemical products stored in the area by the military and federal government; the continuing use and disposal of plastics, Styrofoam, batteries, and other solid wastes; and the effects of airborne pollutants.

The Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD), with its central office located in Fairbanks, covers 10 school sites within the western interior of Alaska. Total student population for the district is approximately 600. Nine school sites are within the Koyukon language area, with one site located in the Lower Tanana language area.

Research Methods

Final selection of Koyukuk as a case study appears to have been a decision between the 1996–1997 (now-retired) principal and the former director of curriculum for the Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD). Community members, although well-acquainted with the AOTE process, were not immediately aware that Koyukuk would be taking part in this statewide case study and were not given a voice in this decision.

Data for this case study were collected between 1997 and 1999. During three site visits, I conducted individual interviews, classroom observations, and one student focus group. Interviews with two teachers were audiotaped. In 1998, a modified Quality of Student Life Questionnaire was administered to students in grades 1 through 5 by case study team member Eliza Jones. An open question format covering the same topics was administered to students in grades 6 through 10. AOTE meeting minutes and other documents were obtained from the district office. Contact between site visits was maintained through phone calls and written correspondence with the principal/teacher and case study team members.

Assessment data have not been included in the case study. I did not feel standardized test data contributed to the present case study, considering the limited time period since implementation of AOTE and subsequent activities. Other considerations in this decision include the high rate of teacher turnover since the study began.

Participants in the AOTE process made the following comments:

- *". . . [AOTE] allowed people more opportunities to be involved in school—more students also."*
- *"[since AOTE began] more people are involved in community decisions."*
- *"Before this I was not comfortable coming to the school."*
- *"Before AOTE, there were people in the community initiating changes in the school and community."*

When it was introduced in 1995, AOTE provided a vehicle for Koyukuk to formally articulate community educational objectives. Community meetings provided a safe space for community members to discuss past and ongoing lifestyle changes and the importance of maintaining traditional beliefs and values. The following questions and responses come directly from AOTE meeting minutes.

What was life like when you were a child?	Parents and grandparents were teachers; life was good; respect for elders; no jobs—families moved from camp to camp in the subsistence lifestyle; families helping elders and relatives; no modern conveniences; more respect.
What was school like?	Teachers were really strict—only one or two teachers per school; students would visit teachers; ambitious with students competing; no electricity; first one there had to make a fire; emphasis on reading and writing; basic education.
How has life changed?	More technology; parents more involved; less trapping and subsistence; easy money, bigger troubles, more things (sno gos, trucks, TV, electricity); more bored kids; lost our cultural ways.
How have schools changed?	Less discipline; more student and staff travel; more computers and other technology; more parent involvement; more staff; kids focus more on future; more violence; better education program; No 9 a.m. school bell.
What important values and beliefs from our past should we keep in the future?	Listen to elders; respect others; respect for property; respect community, cultural activities, and history; language; family responsibility and roles; ties to physical environment; religious beliefs.
What important values and beliefs do we have about children and learning?	Actively involved in learning; hands-on activities; learning by seeing; competition; teach what is right and wrong; family roles in teaching, uncles teaching nephews; student involvement in cultural activities; learn from respecting; learn by example; trust; from seeing the modeling of appropriate values and beliefs;

	many ways of learning; parent shows interest in child's development.

These educational values were then formulated into specific learning goals for students:

- All students should be involved in learning Native language and culture.
- All students should learn self respect and respect for others.
- All students should be involved in activities that promote sobriety, good mental health, and physical health.
- All students should develop a balance between Native traditions and the technological world.
- All students should learn to be problem solvers and develop their education to their highest potential.
- All students should develop self discipline and be able to make a smooth transition to the next step in their lives.

"Students will be respectful, persistent, self disciplined (including sober and drug free) and productive workers" were specific goals for the 1996–1997 school year.

The following are examples of school reform and collaborative projects that AOTE helped initiate.

- *New directions training:* This training, conducted by members of the Alkali Lake community, focused on community health by integrating Native ways of knowing and perspective on wellness issues. Training was held for students in grades 7–12.
- *Community Partnerships for Access, Solutions, and Success (COMPASS):* COMPASS is a systems reform designed to promote partnerships between state government and communities. The process of developing goals, action, and community improvement plans through AOTE facilitated the COMPASS community vision statement and funding for additional collaborative projects, including "research and training information on family journaling, documenting family history and stories, and sharing Athabascan language and cultural information."

- Cultural activities: "Elder Teas" hosted by students provide an opportunity to research various aspects of Koyukon culture; for example, students have interviewed elders about burial sites and practices within the region as part of a gravesite research project. These luncheons also provide community members the opportunity to review the school activity calendar and coordinate related community activities. Other cultural activities include beading, skin sewing, outdoor activities, and Native dance practice.

Major Findings

Several major themes emerge from the AOTE documents, interviews with community members, and investigation of community-school collaborative projects:

- the importance of language and culture to provide students with traditional values, a sense of place, a solid identity, and a feeling of belonging (*'beautiful people live at the base of Meneelghaadze'*)
- the maintenance of environmental and social balance through conventions of traditional respect
- the need for continued holistic learning through demonstrative and cooperative activities

In addition to strengthening the relationship between the community and school and facilitating the implementation of other programs, the AOTE process seems to empower community representatives in their dealings with the district. In 1997, the Koyukuk Community-School Committee (CSC) was given a voice in the selection of the new principal/teacher; for the first time, one of the CSC members went to the Anchorage job fair to help select the incoming principal/teacher. In some instances, however, the prior district administration, although supportive of AOTE, may not have fully appreciated the level of empowerment that accompanied this particular process in Koyukuk. During the course of the case study, there were indirect references to "problems" at the district level. People were reluctant to talk about existing tensions; however, former principal Richard Baxter furnished a letter he had written to the district office regarding the cancellation of a 1997 district board meeting in Koyukuk. This letter made reference to the concerns of downriver villages and the need for district school board support.

Beginning in 1997, there have been major personnel changes at both the school and district level. In the fall of 1998, student numbers dropped below the minimum of 21 required for three teachers. When the study began there were four certified teachers on site. District administration changed with the resignations of superintendent Glenn Olson and director of instruction Tim Cline. Tim Cline was also the district AOTE facilitator. The current superintendent, Tom Klever, intends to resign at the end of 1998–99 school year. There are no Native teachers in Koyukuk currently, although the school has had Native teachers in the past. One of the factors that contributes to the stability of the Koyukuk school has been the consistent presence of strong Native teacher's aides. Former teacher Heidi Imhof credits these aides with the success of many school programs, especially the literacy program.

Community core group dynamics have also changed. Two activist families have moved from Koyukuk to a larger community for economic reasons. Considering the small size of this community, this will result in major changes in how responsibilities are shared within the remaining core group. Members of a core group can often become overloaded with responsibilities: projects to sustain and meetings to attend both in and outside the village. Changes at the district, school, and community level will affect sustainability of reform processes.

Existing community-school partnerships will continue to evolve and change, with new personnel at both the local and district levels. New personnel will need to respect, support, and help strengthen these relationships, recognizing the commitment of the community members to community and school reform. Community members emphasize that although "mission statements, action plans and vision statements look good on paper," there needs to be a strong commitment by all members of the community to follow through on goals and objectives, with consistent support from the district office in Fairbanks.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

- The AOTE process in Koyukuk seemed to work very well as part of a larger community planning process. The AOTE planning meetings helped community members formally articulate their objectives for achieving a strong, healthy community. Members of the leadership team were directly involved with tribal and city council affairs as well as school projects.
- In the small community of Koyukuk, activist families are involved in a variety of community projects. Activists in a small community realize that long term success and sustainability requires broad involvement by many other people (see the vision statement in the full case study).
- During the case study, additional district involvement and support was needed to carry on the AOTE process in Koyukuk. Several planned activities (see the AOTE action plan in the full case study) did take place; however, consistent support from the district office is needed to sustain reforms.
- Educating new teachers takes time. Teacher turnover makes it more difficult to progress with implementation of a reform agenda. Incoming personnel, especially those from outside Alaska, initially experience a steep and time-consuming learning curve in order to become familiar with the community culture, students, and district and community expectations for the local school.
- Teachers and administrators currently have a variety of concerns and accountability issues that can refocus efforts away from deeper reform; i.e. budget considerations stemming from Senate Bill 36 and student preparation for the high-school exit exam.
- The AOTE leadership team should be commended for its role in the community planning process. Koyukuk facilitators adapted the AOTE process to fit the community and successfully facilitated community meetings.

Making School Work in a Changing World:
Tatitlek Community School

Sarah Landis
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Tucked into a cove along the coast of Prince William Sound is the small Alaska Native village of Tatitlek, a picturesque town of under 100 people who have made this area their home for centuries. As remote as the village is, it is certainly no stranger to the strains of modernization and increasing connections the outside world. In recent years the village has seen its subsistence lifestyle disrupted by environmental disasters and abuse, its language and customs fall away, and its children have to choose whether to remain in the village or pursue their interests away from home.

Dealing with these issues has become a focus for many villagers who want to create their own place in the world rather than allowing external forces to determine their future. This process of creating an identity for itself as the village modernizes has presented a number of complex issues and opportunities for residents, not the least of which is how village schooling fits into its aspirations for economic growth and cultural preservation.

In recent years Tatitlek has seen dramatic changes in its school. Tatitlek is part of the Chugach School District, located in Anchorage, which has undergone a radical shift in curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies with the implementation of a new standards-based system and higher expectations of students. Along with this shift, the district has focused on providing opportunities and support for students to learn practical life and employment skills outside the village to increase the likelihood of their postsecondary success. In addition, there has been a significant, though much less tangible, transformation in the nature and quality of community relationships with the school. Although the potential of this improved relationship has not yet been fully realized, the village and the school are beginning to understand their common purposes and their dependence on each other to improve the lives and opportunities for their young people, however these may be defined.

These changes began with the hiring of a new superintendent, district staff, and teachers in 1994, all of whom had strong opinions about improving schools and their relationships with communities. To facilitate their process, the superintendent introduced the Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) school improvement process to the village and began to solicit community input in school decision making. In effect, the AOTE process was used as a tool for clearing the air between school and community after a legacy of poor relations, mistrust, and substandard school services for children. It served as a means to build trust and find common ground and gave the superintendent "marching orders" to restructure the curriculum, services, and assessments provided through the school. As a result, students now have a much greater opportunity to explore their interests outside the village, are held to high standards of learning and performance, and are seeing reflections of their Native culture in the classroom. Major changes at Tatitlek school include:

- *Chugach Instructional Model:* Provides a framework for teaching that leads students from drill and practice to real-life application in every lesson.
- *Anchorage House:* A home-away-from-home experience in which middle and high-school students learn life and employment skills, explore after-graduation options, and apply their learning to real-life situations.
- *Hands-on learning:* Opportunities for application of new knowledge and skills are woven into daily instruction, as is participation in local research and service projects.
- *Performance standards and assessments:* Student competency is no longer measured by credit hours and seat time but by a new set of standards and benchmarks. Students must successfully pass three assessments to demonstrate their learning before advancing to a new level. Standards have been developed and implemented in reading, writing, communication, personal development, social development, service learning, career development, cultural heritage, social sciences, science, technology development, and mathematics.
- *Other innovations:* There have been additional innovations including the use of individual learning plans to encourage greater student responsibility for learning; the Multisensory Teaching Approach to reading, which emphasizes linguistic development; and increasing use of technology, including constant upgrading of hardware, teacher training, and student exposure.

Research Methods

The purpose of this research study was to explore how schooling in Tatitlek has changed and improved to meet the multifaceted needs of this evolving community. Broadly, it uncovers the degree to which community voice has increased in the school and gauges whether student learning and experiences have improved. Specifically, it studies the impact of the Alaska Onward to Excellence program and subsequent reforms on these two broad variables. Data were collected between 1996 and 1998 and included individual and focus group interviews with administrators, district staff, teachers, parents, students, and community members; classroom observations; a student shadow in which I observed one student for one whole school day; the Quality of School Life Questionnaire; a community survey; review of AOTE artifacts, the district teachers' manual, assessments, school improvement plans, and some student work; examination of district-wide student achievement results; and a brief literature review of the historical, economic, and cultural context of Tatitlek.

Major Findings

The study questions about student learning and community voice reveal that AOTE and the district reform initiatives seem to have had a positive effect in Tatitlek, although there have been some hurdles along the way. Following are the main study findings with regard to the research questions.

Using Community Voice to Build Trust

The positive relationship between the community and the school is reliant on the strong, innovative, and responsive leadership of the district staff and teachers. Their dedication to changing the nature of the relationship between Alaska Natives and the schools that serve their children is paramount to understanding the improvements in Tatitlek. Changes would not have happened without the combination of good people with good ideas in a receptive community. There is a very high level of trust among teachers, district staff, and the community. Once villagers recognized the dedication and energy with which staff were going about improvement activities, and once the level of respect for Native culture on the part of the teaching staff was made clear, the school essentially had full community approval of their work. There is no doubt among villagers that the current teaching staff cares deeply about the experience and achievement of each child in the village.

AOTE played a hand in creating these strong relationships. Solicitation of village input seems to have inspired people to feel they were contributing to something important. The basis of the new relationship to the school was established during the AOTE process, generating a sense of trust for the teachers, a feeling of ownership for the school, and renewed hope for children's future.

The new teachers have been perhaps the most important ingredients in the reform recipe because they have made themselves a part of the community rather than remaining "outsiders." They are highly respectful of Native lifestyle and take an active interest in the social and cultural activities going on in the village. In Tatitlek, teachers act as a bridge between the district and the community. Because of this connective role, villagers' perception of their children's teachers as friends rather than outsiders is pivotal to engendering community support for restructuring the school and introducing new instructional approaches to the classroom.

There is mutual benefit from the new and improved school-community relationships. Not only are villagers seeing their children benefit from a better academic program and broader array of opportunities, they have also been able to engage in a productive dialogue about their hopes for the future of the village via discussion about their children. On the flip side, teachers' work in dramatically transforming the school has been broadly supported by the village, making at least the communication of change easier.

Student Experiences and Learning

Tatitlek students have better opportunities to learn outside the village; more chances to engage in real-world, hands-on learning; higher academic and social expectations to attain; teachers who genuinely care about their well-being and their learning; and a greatly enhanced knowledge of their Native roots. By their own account, students are generally very satisfied with the quality of their school experience and appreciate the new opportunities provided them. They are beginning to gain a better sense of their own futures: how to imagine, create, and sustain them.

While this case study rendered no data on quantifiable changes in Tatitlek student achievement over time because of data limitations and concerns of confidentiality, district level achievement data indicate that, district-wide, students are performing better on the CAT/5, Woodcock Reading, and Six-Trait Writing assessments.

Challenges Facing Tatitlek

While all of the restructuring and support-building activities have been beneficial, they have not been institutionalized in the village. The lack of formal structures to support the relationship and turn it into a formal partnership means that collaboration and community support are even more reliant on the current teachers and on the current village leadership. There is a limited definition and acceptance of the notion of sharing responsibility for student success in Tatitlek. While people understood the importance of their support for the school, they did not see easy connections to supporting their children's academics outside of the school.

The issue of teaching life skills and preparing students to succeed after high school in whatever setting they choose is at the heart of the reform agenda in Tatitlek. At present, the strategies in place for students focus on preparing them for jobs, education, and living outside of the village. There is little in the formal system that emphasizes the skills and knowledge students will need should they choose to stay in Tatitlek.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

The lessons from Tatitlek's experience with systemic school improvement are readily applicable in other contexts and with other reform programs in addition to AOTE. They reveal the need for increased focus on the relationships between school, district, community, and families and for flexibility in design to best fit the needs and strengths of particular communities.

AOTE had to be modified from its original form to compensate for the small size and special needs of the village. The process may have been too formal to fit well with a close-knit community that approaches community decision making more casually than working by formal committee or attending scheduled meetings. It may also have been too demanding, slow, or redundant for a small village with a bent toward harmony over conflict or disagreement over ideas. Once AOTE had moved from the direction-setting phase to developing and implementing plans, the level of community participation dropped off and the formal AOTE process ended before it was fully implemented. One reason for declining interest may be that parents began to see their children engaged in more interesting and relevant activities as new district-level programs were implemented, leading to an attitude of "why fix it if it isn't broken." There was also a strong reluctance on the part of the community to interfere in what it considers "school affairs" or to assume expertise in educational matters. Finally, there was little local ownership of the process, even if the outcomes and values were supported.

The barriers to true community ownership and involvement extend beyond enhancing the trust level or bridging cultural differences. It means creating entirely new habits and frames of mind about learning and responsibility. In a community entirely unacquainted with authentic or meaningful involvement in school, this is a truly foreign notion. The parent and community involvement component of AOTE and other improvement efforts needs very careful attention in communities that may not be accustomed to playing a central role in school decision making and instruction.

Relationships are the key to improvement. While building a strong educational infrastructure is critical to the sustainability of any improvement effort, the quality of daily interactions and communication between teachers, students, parents, and community members are its bread and butter. These good relationships nurture the communication and understanding necessary for support of substantive school and curricular restructuring. The Chugach School District has implemented a number of innovative, unorthodox changes, such as the conversion to a standards-based system, that would hardly have been possible without a strong degree of community understanding and endorsement.

A school improvement process such as AOTE that meaningfully engages the community in designing the reform can be a very strong tool, especially for new superintendents, district staff, or teachers who need a forum to reach out to the community, learn their values and goals for education, and generate support for their work. By the same token, improvement processes that are heavy on community input and responsibility but are not initiated by the community itself, run the risk of faltering once the community has to assume responsibility for making changes.

In a village of under 100 residents with only 23 students, it is not surprising that the individual perceptions and actions of key people play a crucial role in formulating and implementing a reform effort. Staff who have been active in supporting the AOTE process feel that it has made significant contributions to educational reform because it has put them in touch with the undercurrents in the community and enabled the school to determine areas of work that are in harmony with local needs. Even though their work has enjoyed widespread community support in Tatitlek, AOTE did little to educate and empower residents to be more active participants in school decision making or to foster a sense of mutual responsibility for student success. District and school staff have tried to work from the cues provided by community members and have designed some innovative and responsive programs. But as the new programs become realities, it is still unclear whether they will provide the desired student results, remain in keeping with village values, and be sustainable in spite of teacher turnover and political pressures.

Despite these limitations, there is much evidence of real change and significant improvement in community voice and student learning. This case study indicates that, if the district can withstand the chaos that characterizes rural Alaska education and maintain fidelity to village values, it stands a strong chance of helping more students reach success. Tatitlek is already well on its way to doing so.

It Takes More Than Good Intentions to Build a Partnership: Klawock City Schools

Jim Kushman
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

In the temperate climate of far southeastern Alaska, you can fly or take a ferry from Ketchikan to the small town of Klawock among the forested mountains and hillsides of Prince of Wales Island. Klawock is a center for Tlingit Indian culture on the small island, which includes several other coastal towns connected by paved road. An important Klawock landmark is the Totem Park, which displays restored and replica totem poles from the old village. The park, which sits next to the school, is a symbol of both Alaska Native heritage and new partnerships between school and community. Through a city-school agreement, an Alaska Native teacher and his high-school students are restoring the weather-worn totem poles as part of the Native arts curriculum; in return, the city and other funding sources have helped the school build a new Native Arts Center and studio. Once the site of a bustling salmon cannery (the first in Alaska), Klawock has evolved into a mixed Tlingit and white community with about 750 people and many amenities such as roads, stores, restaurants, and other services not usually found in remote Alaska villages. Logging, fishing, and services provide a jobs economy, yet subsistence fishing and hunting are still very important activities for both Alaska Native and non-Native residents.

The Klawock City School District is a single-school district located just seven miles from another single-school district in the town of Craig. The elementary, middle, and high school is comprised of just over 200 students with slightly more than half Alaska Native. As rural Alaska schools go, Klawock is neither extremely high poverty (with about one-quarter of students from low-income families) nor at the bottom in student achievement. The 20 or so students I personally talked to in Klawock viewed their school as a safe and caring place within a tight-knit island community. Kids and many adults care about sports as much as academics, and as in many small towns, school sports are an important part of community life. While Klawock appears as a largely safe and stable small-town community, some teachers reported a growing drug problem on the fringes of campus and continuing problems with alcoholism in the community.

Klawock participated in the two-year Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) process between 1996 and 1998. While Klawock is marked by less poverty and higher student test scores than some of the truly remote villages under study, it has been working on school improvement for at least eight years and deals with a number of rising student risk factors, including poverty, a depressed local economy, a culturally mixed community, and an unusually high percentage of special needs students.

Research Methods

The Klawock case study included data on educational reform, community voice, and student experiences and learning for the period before and during the implementation of AOTE. The goal was to learn how AOTE fits into the bigger picture of ongoing reform in this rural Alaska community, and how it can help increase community voice and lead to new actions and partnerships that improve the experiences and learning of students. Interviews, surveys, observations, and archival data were collected through three multiday visits which I made to Klawock throughout the two-year AOTE implementation period (1996–98). A student Quality of School Life Questionnaire was included, as in some of the other case studies.

The case study was a group effort. A local case study team that included a high school counselor/teacher, an elementary teacher, and an Alaska Native community member (along with the occasional help of some student researchers) collected observational, survey, and interview data to supplement my field visits. In addition, the team met five times in Anchorage (along with teams from other villages) to plan data collection and analyze qualitative and quantitative data.

Major Findings

AOTE intends to bring community involvement, a focus on student learning, and a systemic approach to educational reform in rural Alaska Native communities. In Klawock, AOTE was weakly implemented. An AOTE leadership team was never formed, and the process was carried by two local facilitators and a superintendent. The superintendent who initiated AOTE was working from a strategic plan that he had developed with a school/community strategic planning team in the early 1990s. While specifying a clear mission and student learning goals, the strategic plan had little credibility with school staff or the community. AOTE was consciously used to secure community endorsement for this strategic plan rather than following the prescribed activities for eliciting community voice in setting a new direction. After five community meetings that few community members attended, AOTE faded away midway into its second year.

Factors That Hindered the AOTE Process

The message that AOTE was a more systemic, community-based approach to school reform did not filter through the training, particularly when only two local facilitators attended the AOTE training sessions in Juneau. While the two local facilitators (a teacher assistant and community member, both Alaska Natives) had strong roots in the community and strong views about community involvement, they alone could not carry the process. They worked without a leadership team and in the presence of a strong superintendent who did not fully understand AOTE.

Three reasons are offered for the weak implementation of AOTE: (a) an unwillingness of the school to share decision-making power with the community; (b) poor communication about AOTE, resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding; and (c) little desire by most parents and community members to take a more active role in education. The AOTE process was also implemented in a context of competing reforms, including high-stakes reforms like the Alaska Quality Schools Initiative, which was receiving increased attention by school leaders. Educational reform has been very fragmented in Klawock over the past five years. Many programs and reform efforts similar to AOTE (like outcomes-based education and NWREL's Successful Schools) have come and gone, and AOTE was no exception. As it was being implemented, teachers and community members were weary of yet another reform program. Yet teachers continue to introduce new innovations in spite of (rather than because of) district-initiated reform models like AOTE. In Klawock, bringing research-based practices into the classroom is more a matter of teacher professional initiative than structured processes like AOTE.

Community Voice

AOTE attempts to bring community voice into education so that rural Alaska Native communities and the formal school system can work in harmony to achieve student success around community-valued goals. In Klawock, our data collection and analysis focused primarily on shared decision-making and parent involvement. Both of these proved difficult to achieve.

The superintendent who began the AOTE process seemed unwilling to share the reform agenda with the community. He understood AOTE as a process of the community endorsing a *school* mission and goals rather than a process of shared decision-making where school and community are partners with equal voice. By the same token, parents and other community members seemed reluctant to take on new roles as decision makers and viewed AOTE meetings as rather unimportant activities. People on both sides seemed to be either unwilling or uncomfortable in changing the traditional parent and educator roles. Teachers and parent surveys revealed that both parties see the primary parent role as helping educate children in the home and supporting what teachers do in the classroom. Only a small minority of parents see roles for themselves as classroom volunteers or as participants in school decision making. This view of the parent role is endorsed by teachers. The parents and teachers in Klawock operate as separate spheres of influence and seem locked into these roles, despite the rhetoric on both sides that more parent involvement is needed.

Many parents do not know how they are supposed to express their voice in school matters or feel frustrated when they try to do so. Some Alaska Native parents, particularly those who have had negative school experiences as young people, continue to feel a sense of alienation from the formal school system. Alienated parents can become distrustful of school claims that they want parent involvement. These hard-to-reach parents may be unwilling to participate in anything the school has to offer, including bottom-up approaches like AOTE.

Student Experiences and Learning

Students saw both positive and negative facets of their school and learning experiences in Klawock. They were most positive about their relationships with caring and committed teachers, but saw room for improvement in classroom activities and course offerings. While many students seem content with the quality of school life (measured as satisfaction with school, commitment to coursework, and reactions to teachers via the Quality of School Life Questionnaire), there was a small group of disaffected students, particularly at the middle-school level.

The longitudinal data available on student achievement was limited to scores on the state-sponsored achievement tests (Iowa Test of Basic Skills and more recently the California Achievement Test). For the period before and during the five years of school reforms in Klawock (including initiatives in strategic planning, outcomes-based education, Successful Schools, AOTE, and curriculum alignment with state standards), there were no consistent achievement trends across subjects and grades. There were improvements in bringing up the bottom quartile in grade 4 reading, grade 4 math, and grade 8 language. On the other hand, grade 4 language showed declining achievement. Of the 12 sets of trend scores, six showed a pattern of little or no change between 1989 and 1997.

The Challenge of Integrating Reforms

Despite its slow progress with formal reform processes like AOTE, Klawock should be commended for the efforts of dedicated educators and a caring community who want students to succeed. The full case study presents some of these positive academic accomplishments. In regard to the failed implementation of AOTE, it is important to recognize that leadership changes and the different leadership styles of the two superintendents during 1996-98 made AOTE more difficult to implement.

Participating in the AOTE process did not bring more clarity to an already crowded reform agenda in Klawock. AOTE was perceived as more of the same by teachers and community members who had seen a lot of "reform" over the past five years yet not much change in teaching or student learning as a result. Some good things were happening in classrooms and some teachers were changing their practice, of which practices into the classroom is more a matter of teacher professional initiative than structured processes like AOTE.

Community Voice

AOTE attempts to bring community voice into education so that rural Alaska Native communities and the formal school system can work in harmony to achieve student success around community-valued goals. In Klawock, our data collection and analysis focused primarily on shared decision-making and parent involvement. Both of these proved difficult to achieve.

The superintendent who began the AOTE process seemed unwilling to share the reform agenda with the community. He understood AOTE as a process of the community endorsing a *school* mission and goals rather than a process of shared decision-making where school and community are partners with equal voice. By the same token, parents and other community members seemed reluctant to take on new roles as decision makers and viewed AOTE meetings as rather unimportant activities. People on both sides seemed to be either unwilling or uncomfortable in changing the traditional parent and educator roles. Teachers and parent surveys revealed that both parties see the primary parent role as helping educate children in the home and supporting what teachers do in the classroom. Only a small minority of parents see roles for themselves as classroom volunteers or as participants in school decision making. This view of the parent role is endorsed by teachers. The parents and teachers in Klawock operate as separate spheres of influence and seem locked into these roles, despite the rhetoric on both sides that more parent involvement is needed.

Many parents do not know how they are supposed to express their voice in school matters or feel frustrated when they try to do so. Some Alaska Native parents, particularly those who have had negative school experiences as young people, continue to feel a sense of alienation from the formal school system. Alienated parents can become distrustful of school claims that they want parent involvement. These hard-to-reach parents may be unwilling to participate in anything the school has to offer, including bottom-up approaches like AOTE.

Student Experiences and Learning

Students saw both positive and negative facets of their school and learning experiences in Klawock. They were most positive about their relationships with caring and committed teachers, but saw room for improvement in classroom activities and course offerings. While many students seem content with the quality of school life (measured as satisfaction with school, commitment to coursework, and reactions to teachers via the Quality of School Life Questionnaire), there was a small group of disaffected students, particularly at the middle-school level.

The longitudinal data available on student achievement was limited to scores on the state-sponsored achievement tests (Iowa Test of Basic Skills and more recently the California Achievement Test). For the period before and during the five years of school reforms in Klawock (including initiatives in strategic planning, outcomes-based education, Successful Schools, AOTE, and curriculum alignment with state standards), there were no consistent achievement trends across subjects and grades. There were improvements in bringing up the bottom quartile in grade 4 reading, grade 4 math, and grade 8 language. On the other hand, grade 4 language showed declining achievement. Of the 12 sets of trend scores, six showed a pattern of little or no change between 1989 and 1997.

The Challenge of Integrating Reforms

Despite its slow progress with formal reform processes like AOTE, Klawock should be commended for the efforts of dedicated educators and a caring community who want students to succeed. The full case study presents some of these positive academic accomplishments. In regard to the failed implementation of AOTE, it is important to recognize that leadership changes and the different leadership styles of the two superintendents during 1996-98 made AOTE more difficult to implement.

Participating in the AOTE process did not bring more clarity to an already crowded reform agenda in Klawock. AOTE was perceived as more of the same by teachers and community members who had seen a lot of "reform" over the past five years yet not much change in teaching or student learning as a result. Some good things were happening in classrooms and some teachers were changing their practice, of which students took notice. However, AOTE was not able to bring a more integrated approach to improving student learning in this community.

Lessons Learned About Systemic Change

A major theme of this case, as expressed in its title, is that it takes more than good intentions to achieve a school/community partnership and results for students. A key to a successful partnership is the willingness to genuinely share power with the community rather than just seeking its endorsement of established school practices. School leaders need to understand the distinction between the community providing input, as in many strategic planning models, and engaging in shared decision making. The crux of community voice is the willingness to share decision-making power across the school board, central office, school administrators, teachers, and community members. If school leaders are unwilling to do this, a process like AOTE may only lead to frustration and more resentment in rural Alaska communities.

People tend to see community voice and involvement as an easy solution to improving education. It is, in fact, a slow and steady process that requires trust, communication, understanding, and accountability. Trust is the basis of any partnership, and frequent two-way communication is what keeps the partnership going. People need to understand that a partnership means new roles and responsibilities for everyone. Cross-cultural understanding between Native people and non-Native educators also needs to be nurtured, and any cultural misunderstandings that can damage trust need to be brought to the surface and dealt with. Finally, fault-finding needs to be replaced with a relentless pursuit of academic excellence and a shared accountability among teachers, parents, and students to achieve community-valued goals. Beyond the mechanical steps of AOTE (forming leadership teams, running community meetings, developing action plans), some dialogue about these deeper issues must be built into the school improvement process. Trainers, facilitators, and other change agents need to keep an eye on these issues and be ready with some helpful intervention strategies throughout the entire improvement process.

Parents and other community members may not always want more voice. They may be satisfied enough that they don't find the time and put forth the effort. They may also believe that parents and the school always have been, and therefore always should be, separate rather than overlapping spheres of influence on children. Finally, they may be so unfamiliar or uncomfortable with new parent roles like "parent volunteer" and "parent decision maker" that changing old behaviors is difficult, even when the desire is there. AOTE and similar processes seeking more community voice should not assume that all parents and community members want to be involved in the same ways. Yet all parents are motivated by the successes or failures of their own children in school. Bringing parents into the larger educational process may require convincing parents that when all children are successful, the whole community prospers and *their* children benefit even more.

Parents and community members do not always know how they are supposed to have a voice unless the school lays out some clear options and communicates these choices. More is required than general invitations, although the tone of the outreach must make parents feel welcome and communicate that their knowledge as noneducators or as Native parents is important. AOTE may place too much emphasis on community meetings as the major expression of community voice. Meetings are problematic because of time, scheduling, and perhaps their public nature. Parents may need other mechanisms such as a parent center in the school or a parent/community involvement coordinator who is a phone call away and can provide information about involvement options as well as encouragement.

If one considers the longer-term strategic planning reforms that AOTE was part of, Klawock again demonstrates that fragmented, programmatic reform—without the buy-in of teachers and community—leads to equally fragmented results for children. AOTE should be a force not only for more community voice but for helping districts and schools integrate the reforms they already have. The positive momentum of a visioning and direction-setting process is quickly lost when a school leadership team is then confronted with a confusing array of mandates, programs, improvement committees, and teacher-led innovations. Rather than adding yet another action plan for improvement, schools and districts need tools to figure out how to simplify so that more attention is given to achieving student results and less to managing "reform activities" that have little connection to each other. When connections among reform efforts are made, educational reform will indeed become more productive.

CHAPTER 3

CROSS-CASE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Each case study summary (and the full case studies that accompany this report) provides a portrait of a unique rural Alaska community engaged in school reform through Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) and other efforts. Working together during several meetings in Anchorage and Fairbanks, the senior and community researchers conducted a cross-case analysis in order to draw out the larger lessons about educational reform in rural Alaska communities. The resulting themes and lessons represent our main study findings and conclusions. Six broad themes resulted from our cross-case analysis:

- *Sustaining reform:* It is easy to start new reforms but difficult to keep up the momentum in order to bring about deep changes in teaching and learning.
- *Shared leadership:* Leadership needs to be defined as shared decision making with the community rather than seeking advice from the community.
- *Building relationships and trust:* Personal relationships and trust are at the heart of real reform, and processes like AOTE are only effective when good relationships exist.
- *Enacting new roles:* Educators and community members are often stuck in old roles while educational partnerships require new behaviors and ways of thinking.
- *Creating coherent reforms:* Small rural communities and school districts need help in sorting through many ongoing reforms in order to create systemic change.
- *Creating healthy communities:* Schools in small rural communities cannot achieve their educational goals in isolation from the well-being of the surrounding community.

Sustaining Reform

Our case studies show that sustaining serious educational reform over the long run is a difficult but not impossible task in rural Alaska. The cases present a variety of scenarios, including communities that could not successfully launch an AOTE reform effort, those which had many starts and stops on a long and winding road towards important community goals, and at least one exceptional community that has been able to create and sustain a Yup'ik first-language program for more than a decade. Overall, the most significant barrier to sustaining reforms in the seven communities we studied was persistent teacher, principal, and superintendent turnover. Turnover has long been recognized as a problem in rural Alaska education. Our case studies show quite graphically how turnover derails reform efforts and leads to a cycle of reinventing school every two or three years.

The turnover problem is most thoroughly discussed and analyzed in the New Stuyahok case, but other cases provide confirming evidence that school-community reform efforts are often put on hold or discontinued as key educators leave and new ones enter the scene. New teachers and administrators, particularly those from outside Alaska, may require two to three years to fully get to know the school, the educational program, and the community. Turnover does not necessarily mean a mass exodus of staff. In very small communities like Tatitlek and Koyukuk, one teacher makes a real difference. Regardless of village size, when new teachers and principals are coming and going it is difficult to establish a consistent direction for reform. It is even more difficult to put new teaching practices in place and develop the strong organizational culture that helps sustain new practices. In his New Stuyahok case study, Jerry Lipka offers the following observations on turnover in rural Alaska schools.

> Clearly, schools and communities in rural Alaska can work together for the improvement of schooling and the betterment of the children. However, this is more easily said than accomplished. From this case study it is apparent that processes such as AOTE, where a dialogue between school and community becomes a part of the district's policy and practice, is one large step in this direction. However, certain historical and structural problems continue to cause perennial challenges. Being far from mainstream America means that teacher turnover is a fact of life in rural Alaska and Native education. Turnover relates directly to the culture of the school and its relationship to the community. Teachers are too often unfamiliar with the communities in which they work and reside, schooling in a sense is always starting over, communities are always socializing the new staff, and too often teachers are forced to teach outside of their area of expertise. Efforts by SWRS [Southwest Region Schools] to stabilize the culture of the school by developing policies and practices that build on

> local knowledge through processes such as AOTE, are surely one way to improve schooling in rural Alaska and stabilize the curriculum.

Why do so many teachers leave? The harsh Alaska conditions and isolation of village life are obvious reasons. Given these conditions, communities need to make outside teachers feel welcome as much as outside teachers need to learn and appreciate their students' cultural background and values. Cross-cultural understanding is a two-way street.

A process like AOTE can help alleviate the turnover problem by creating leadership within the community and the school. The AOTE leadership team, which draws from the community as well as the school, can be a way to bring important village leaders into a long-term change process. As an example, in the very small community of Koyukuk, attention was given to selecting leadership team members from the community who were well-respected, committed to community improvement, and recognized as leaders. These individuals had roles in political and social organizations, including the tribal council, city council, community-school council, and the very influential women's sewing group. A careful selection of leadership team members helps but is no guarantee of long-term sustainable reform. In Koyukuk, some of the important community leaders moved out of the village. Coupled with the turnover of key central office staff (including one of the trained AOTE facilitators), there was once again the sense of a new superintendent and staff starting all over again with the reform process.

In the two communities that have been at AOTE-initiated reforms the longest, Tuluksak and New Stuyahok, there was a clear picture of the change process as a winding road with many curves. Despite setbacks, the positive movement toward a valued community goal in both places was very encouraging. These cases illustrate how a community will keep coming back to a strong vision that truly reflects the deep desires of its people. Through the AOTE process, these communities were able to articulate a strong vision of students being successful both in school and in their traditional language and culture. A strong vision that people believe in provides a force for renewal when things stray off course. The following passage from the Tuluksak case study by Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt illustrates how a strong vision (plus leadership, which is a theme discussed later) can bring the reform process back on track.

> By 1996, the Yupiit School District board was concerned that many aspects of the district mission and goals that had been established through the AOTE process were not evident in the schools. Teachers were continuing to teach the way they were taught, and the problem extended to the whole school, not just the Yup'ik cultural program. A new superintendent (Dr. John Weise from the neighboring Lower Kuskokwim School District) was brought on to help move the school district forward in its efforts to link schooling to the lives that students lived outside of school. Over the course of the following year, the district sponsored several meetings with school staff and community members as well as with invited experts in the educational field, in which they reaffirmed the critical importance of making changes for the betterment and empowerment of the Yupiat people. This gave more community voice to the people, and a renewed commitment was made under the banner of *Kitugiyaraq—the way to restore, to reform.* With the support of the YSD [Yupiit School District] school board and communities, the superintendent submitted a proposal to the U.S. Office of Education/Alaska Native Programs Office for a district-wide curriculum initiative titled "Yup'ik Education for the 21st Century." The proposal was approved and funding was awarded for three years, beginning in August 1997.

While a strong community-based vision provides a constant reminder of what change is supposed to be about, the vision alone will not change day-to-day curricular and instructional practices. It takes more. Our best example of a community where the vision is being realized and sustained is Quinhagak. Quinhagak has worked for many years to establish a strong Yup'ik first language program that reflects the community vision. AOTE was a catalyst to this process but by far not the only factor that has sustained the vision. The bilingual reforms have been sustained in Quinhagak because, to a large extent, *the school is the community* and turnover is not an issue. Many teachers are lifelong residents; they are Yup'ik speakers who have returned to teach after receiving their college degrees. Most school aides also speak Yup'ik and work alongside other community members who are either school volunteers or paid school workers. The principal is a lifelong resident of Quinhagak who has both a personal and professional commitment to bilingual education. The following excerpt from Carol Barnhardt's Quinhagak study illustrates how a shared vision is sustained, not only because the community is stable but because the community is empowered and encouraged to help make the vision a reality.

> In Quinhagak, because of the community's decision to use Yup'ik as the language of instruction and to require Yup'ik Life Skills for all high-school students, and because of the district's requirement to incorporate Yup'ik themes in all Lower Kuskokwim School District schools, there *must* be involvement from Yup'ik people in the community because only a very limited number of non-Natives know the language or have the cultural knowledge necessary to meet these curriculum and pedagogical objectives. The *Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat* curriculum demands the involvement of Yup'ik people, and the presence of such a high percentage of Yup'ik speakers as teachers and aides provides students with a realistic option of meeting the school and community goals and objectives. . . . Community people who are not in paid positions in the school are also directly involved through their responsibilities for decision making as members of the Advisory School Board. They deal with matters ranging from setting the school calendar to approving changes in the school's bilingual program to helping establish budget priorities. The AOTE process also requires involvement of community members on village, leadership, and research teams and provides the opportunity for broader participation through the community-wide meetings and potlucks. Within the school, several incentives for parent participation have been established during and after school activities.

The lesson to be taken from Quinhagak is that rural Alaska districts and communities need to develop their own talent from within. An appropriate slogan might be, "grow your own!" Schools need to identify the core group of people committed to the educational vision, including those that have the language and cultural knowledge to help carry the vision forward. Investments need to be made so that these individuals are developed as teachers, teacher aides, and community volunteers. Teacher aides who know the language and culture are an especially important asset. Mentoring these people and providing career ladders for local teacher aides to become certified teachers is one strategy that has helped Quinhagak and the Lower Kuskokwim School District achieve a core of bilingual teachers, without which the vision of bilingual education could never be realized. District funds are also used to help carry out the community vision. Yup'ik teachers are employed by the district over the summer to create books, lessons, and other Yup'ik teaching materials. Once again, without this tangible support the vision would remain only a dream with little chance of being actualized. Quinhagak provides an excellent example of a rural Alaska community where a community vision and community voice are transformed into real educational changes that will affect today's students and future generations.

Finally, educational partnerships need to be nurtured and commitments need to be renewed over time. Partnerships are not necessarily self-sustaining, as Beth Leonard concludes in her Koyukuk case study:

> Existing community-school partnerships will continue to evolve and change with new personnel at both the local and district levels. New personnel will need to respect, support, and help strengthen these relationships, recognizing the commitment of the community members to community and school reform. Community members emphasize that although mission statements, action plans, and vision statements look good on paper, there needs to be a strong commitment by all members of the community to follow through on goals and objectives, with consistent support from the district office in Fairbanks.

Shared Leadership

A clear lesson from the case studies is that leadership must happen on several levels. Tatitlek and the Chugach School District illustrate the power of a strong, reform-minded superintendent. With a clear charge to improve education from the school board, the Chugach superintendent used AOTE to engage the community in a dialogue about student learning goals and gain community support for sweeping educational changes. The dynamic here is the strong charismatic leader who seeks the input of the community and then works with other educators to design fundamental changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As evidenced by Tatitlek, this seems to be working as a reform strategy, at least for now, because there is trust between the community and the educators. This trust was strengthened through the AOTE process. Other communities we studied (e.g., New Stuyahok and Quinhagak) also attest to the power of strong and consistent superintendent leadership in order to bring planned educational changes to fruition over a period of years.

The case studies illustrate, however, that strong superintendent leadership is probably not enough. Strong leadership from the top can sometimes hinder rather than help a community-guided reform process. The important distinction here is between leadership as a shared decision-making process and top-down leadership that invites community input rather than full community voice. The two fledgling AOTE sites (Klawock and Aniak/Kalskag) illustrate how districts with traditions of top-down management have difficulty making a transition to shared decision making. The lesson here is that a process like AOTE only works when the leaders believe and act on the principles of community voice, which in our definition includes shared decision making. This is a readiness issue that trainers and model developers need to pay attention to. District leaders need to clearly understand that with a process like AOTE, they are buying into a different way of making educational decisions rather than a prescriptive educational program. Leaders who do not genuinely believe in shared decision making are likely to falter with a process like AOTE. Furthermore, when a district buys into shared decision making, it must follow through on its commitment and not choose to exercise veto power just because it may not like a consensus decision. A community will quickly sense when district leaders are not "walking the talk," and this can seriously erode trust.

Strong superintendent leadership helps drive reforms. Yet our cases also attest to the limitations of top-down leadership and illustrate how *shared* leadership helps districts and communities sustain reforms. Shared leadership creates the high degree of community involvement that will move educational changes through frequent superintendent and principal turnover. In Tatitlek, where most of the leadership came from the superintendent, AOTE was judged to be a partial success because there was little evidence of shared responsibility for student success, as illustrated in this excerpt from Sarah Landis' case study:

> In many ways, AOTE was both a great success and a keen disappointment in Tatitlek. On the up side, it succeeded in securing community participation in setting the direction for the school, a first in the history of this small Native community and its Western-style schools. The process helped forge a strong sense of trust between the community and the school staff as well as the superintendent. . . . On the other hand, AOTE did not reach its full potential in Tatitlek by creating tight, long-term community and parent partnerships that support student learning. In fact, the process essentially died out as it reached a phase of delegating activities and responsibilities out of the classrooms and into the community in support of student success. Even attempts to get the village council to assume responsibility for arranging Cultural Heritage Week have not worked. There was a general sense that Tatitlek residents will support anything that

> benefits their children, but they felt that the specifies of schooling and learning are the domain of the teachers. The AOTE process was not able to unseat this belief.

A point of contrast to the leadership style apparent in Tatitlek and the Chugach School District is Quinhagak, where shared leadership coupled with shared responsibility has been consciously practiced by the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD). In Quinhagak and other LKSD communities, the real reform is local control for education, rather than a particular strategic planning model like AOTE. In 1995, LKSD embraced AOTE as a way to move from traditional district strategic planning to the district working with schools and local communities to share decision making and responsibility for student success. This fit nicely with an established district practice of using the local school advisory committees for more than just giving advice. Advisory committees are involved in core decisions, such as how the school budget will be spent, the kind of educational programs that will be put in place, and selection of the school principal. The district invests in training local advisory board members in areas like the school budget so that they have the capacity to make sound decisions. This is true shared decision making rather than the rhetoric of shared decision making. To the extent that our cases represent rural Alaska, it is very rare for a local advisory committee to have this kind of power. Coupled with the strong district support for the Quinhagak bilingual program described earlier, there is a true partnership with district leaders, school leaders, and community leaders working together.

A tempting question to ask here is: which leadership style is more effective? Will superintendent-designed improvements in Tatitlek lead to more tangible changes for students than the longer, bottom-up approach in Quinhagak which builds local capacity? These districts and communities represent different contexts and have set different improvement goals, so direct comparisons are difficult to make. The little bits of evidence on student achievement available from the case studies suggest that both approaches are resulting in greater academic success in their respective communities. However, we would argue that the shared leadership model in Quinhagak may have more staying power because it invests in the people and tries to build community leaders as a long-term strategy. It has taken LKSD more than a few years to build the organizational structures and the trust and understanding for community leaders and school leaders to successfully work together, whether it be on the local school advisory committee or the AOTE leadership team. The Chugach School District may also experience success because research-based innovations have been carefully chosen and district and school staff are working hard to implement them. However, the investment here focuses only on teacher development rather than developing teachers and community leaders. One wonders what will happen when there is a change in superintendent leadership at the Chugach District or when teachers leave a small community like Tatitlek.

These two communities represent contrasting styles of leadership for creating educational changes around community-valued goals. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach, and the real issue is the fit between the approach to reform and the vision of student success. In Quinhagak, Carol Barnhardt is quick to point out that the school must invest in the community because it is the lifelong residents who carry the Yup'ik language that is so central to the community's vision of success. Chugach School District is motivated by pressure from its school board to show improvements in academic areas so that its focus on district performance standards, assessment, and new instructional techniques makes sense. Systemic reform is not a linear process and there is more than one path to the same end.

Building Relationships and Trust

A reform model like AOTE can be a powerful tool in the right hands. However, the relationships and trust between school and community people provide the foundation for the model to work, as alluded to in the discussion above. The cases show that reform moves forward in large measure through personal relationships built on trust and caring for children. Relationships and trust are the groundwork of sustainable change, providing a rich soil on which the seeds of change can grow. This is magnified in small communities, where personal relationships are more central than formal decision processes as the way to get things done. The importance of trust and personal relationships was most visible in our two very small communities, Tatitlek and Koyukuk. Tatitlek demonstrates how outside teachers can gain the trust of the community if they take the time to understand the community's traditions and heritage and use this knowledge to create meaningful educational experiences for students.

Many of the case studies pointed to the personal connections in small communities that are so important for carrying out formal, external reform models like AOTE. A key teacher, principal, leadership team member, parent, or elder who is highly respected in the community can be the spark that keeps the change process moving forward. It is these respected people and their relationships with others that help the whole community develop an understanding of and connection to the model's principles. On the other hand, Aniak-Kalskag shows how AOTE can be viewed as a formal and complicated set of procedures rather than a trust-building process. It was difficult for the AOTE-trained facilitators in these two villages, who had little training or facilitation experience themselves, to train leadership teams. There were also logistical difficulties in holding five or six prescribed community meetings during the school year in busy subsistence villages. Klawock experienced similar problems, with local facilitators who were well connected to the community but who had little familiarity or experience with formal processes like AOTE.

The lesson here is that too much emphasis can be put on process and procedure from the outside and not enough on building the relationships and trust from the inside. It is the relationships and trust that lead to ownership for a reform process. If serious attention is not paid to these factors, then a reform process like AOTE becomes another program to be dutifully put in place and be finished with. The effort will sustain itself for awhile until people lose interest in something they neither fully understand nor feel personally connected to. Bruce Miller, in the Aniak-Kalskag case study, points out how a process like AOTE needs to work from the local context and the relationships that already exist within a community.

> AOTE might be improved if it began with a core group of motivated individuals from each village that spends time identifying key community networks and individuals who can positively influence the community and school. They would engage these individuals in a dialogue about the school and community in terms of their work. In other words, learn what they do, discover their interests and desires, and engage them in their ideas for supporting and helping youth. The focus is aimed at building relationships and the common ground upon which to make improvement decisions. . . . Classroom-level examples of the kinds of communication

> necessary for engaging and sustaining such relationships were discovered during interviews with teachers and parents. The common pattern across these examples reflects teachers going out of their routine roles to interact with parents and community members in ways that demonstrate genuine caring for students and an understanding of local context and place. . . . These examples have much to teach us about how reform and improvement can occur in village life. Moreover, such a focus builds on local assets and resources as opposed to building on problems and needs.

This inside-out approach can lead to more sustained public engagement in the reform process than the observed pattern in many of these case studies—fewer and fewer community people attending AOTE-sponsored community meetings as time goes on. This perspective changes the message that educators send to the community. Instead of asking the community to "come help us fix our school" the message becomes, "let's work together to raise healthy children."

Cross-cultural understanding is an important factor in building the strong relationships that can sustain reform in rural Alaska communities. Vignettes in some of the case studies show how many Alaska Natives feel alienated from the school system. Many adults from just one generation ago had negative school experiences in local schools or boarding schools and were made to feel that their knowledge and worldview had no place in the formal education system. This view of education is changing in rural Alaska, but old attitudes persist. There is still a healing process going on, and AOTE—if implemented with a clear sense of creating genuine community voice—can accelerate the healing.

Enacting New Roles

Enacting new roles as educational partners means that educators and parents must first unlearn the old roles. This theme is best summed up by a parent from Klawock who said: "I don't know how I am supposed to have a voice." What this statement reveals is that while it is easy to talk about creating partnerships, changing the traditional roles, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes is a learning process for both school personnel and parents. There is still a strong mindset that parent and teacher domains are separate in rural Alaska communities. Our case studies reveal that without a compelling goal deeply rooted in community values, like preserving language and cultural knowledge, many parents and community members may be content to leave education to the educators. As our introduction points out, this was in fact the message of past reforms, which led to the separation of Native knowledge and the formal westernized knowledge taught in schools. Unseating old beliefs is multigenerational work. Sarah Landis, in her case study summary, points out how important and difficult it is to change core beliefs about who is responsible for educating children:

> The barriers to true community ownership and involvement extend beyond enhancing the trust level or bridging cultural differences. It means creating entirely new habits and frames of mind about learning and responsibility. In a community entirely unacquainted with authentic or meaningful involvement in school, this is a truly foreign notion. The parent and community involvement component of AOTE and other improvement efforts needs very careful attention in communities that may not be accustomed to playing a central role in school decision making and instruction.

The research on parent involvement suggests a number of important factors that influence family involvement in schools (see Chavkin, 1993; D'Angelo & Alder, 1991; Epstein, 1991, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Okakok, 1989; Tushnet, 1993). These factors include:

- role expectations parents have for themselves and the expectations communicated by schools through their invitations and actions
- parents' own sense of efficacy as educators, which is determined in part by their own experiences and successes in school
- cross-cultural misunderstandings; different role expectations between predominantly white teachers and Alaska Native or other ethnic groups

These community involvement subthemes were seen throughout our case studies. In Quinhagak, for example, the tone established was that the school belongs to the community—as evidenced by its name, Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat, which few non-Yup'ik speaking people are able to pronounce. Parents, elders, and other community members work in the school as paid workers, as unpaid volunteers, and as educators in the home. Given the nature of the improvement goal (educate students to speak both

Yup'ik and English), community members were certainly made to feel they had important knowledge to offer the formal education system. Carol Barnhardt's case study summary of Quinhagak provides some rich detail of how families can become involved in many facets of educating children.

> Many parents in Quinhagak are now directly involved in their school because they are serving as the school's teachers, aides, cooks, custodians—and principal. Several community members serve their school in other positions. Those on the Advisory School Board deal with matters ranging from setting the school calendar to approving changes in the school's bilingual programs and AOTE goals to assisting in establishing budget priorities to annual approval of the school's principal. The AOTE process also requires volunteer involvement of community members on leadership teams, and AOTE provides the opportunity for broader participation through its community-wide meetings and potlucks. Other venues for direct participation include the Village Wellness Committee Team and the Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat Discipline Committee. . . . Some family members participate in less formal ways through volunteer work in their children's classroom or as chaperones on trips. Others contribute through efforts in their own homes (e.g., providing a quiet place for children to study, reading with and to children, reviewing homework assignments with them). A description of 15 initiatives that were designed to promote increased parent, family, and community involvement and participation in the school were identified by the school in 1997. There were 119 volunteers and 1,500 hours of volunteer services in 1997–98.

This portrayal of family involvement mirrors Joyce Epstein's (1995) concept of "overlapping spheres of influence," in which school personnel and families work closely together to strengthen each others influence on children. Quinhagak demonstrates that old notions of schooling can be replaced by a new philosophy that holds everyone (teachers, parents, elders, and students) accountable for student success.

Finally, in thinking about how community and school people enact new roles as educational partners, Oscar Kawagley (in his comments made during data analysis meetings in Anchorage) pointed out the distinction between *assimilation,* in which Native people are absorbed into Western-based schooling and *integration,* in which Native language, local culture, and ways of knowing become a valid part of formal schooling. Yupiaq people—as documented in the Tuluksak, Quinhagak, and New Stuyahok cases—are struggling to live a life where the traditional and modern are integrated and balanced.

107

Yet because of many years and generations of dominance by Western institutions, Yupiaq people today do not know how to reclaim their traditions, knowledge, language, and culture as part of the educational system. One function of educational reform and partnerships like AOTE is to help them do this by rekindling the spirit of a people who feel marginalized by the education system rather than part of it.

Creating Coherent Reforms

Creating coherent, systemic educational reforms—as opposed to piecemeal programmatic reforms one on top of the other—is a challenge in schools throughout the United States. Our case studies show that this is even more of a challenge in rural Alaska. As a start to our research, the case study teams went through a concept mapping exercise to identify the major activities aimed at improving the learning and experiences of students over the past five years. We used this very simple definition of educational reform to generate maps of the larger reform landscape that AOTE was part of in each community. In some cases, the teams took the maps back to their villages and added the insights of others, including elders, teachers, parents, and students. By the time the maps were finished, they revealed many teacher-led, superintendent-led, state-mandated, and community-led reforms occurring simultaneously. Participants were able to make conceptual connections between the various efforts (e.g., AOTE as an offshoot of strategic planning or other initiatives to increase community involvement), yet the elements of the maps were often independent activities with little real connections or coordination.

AOTE was a central part of the reform maps, but as our case studies unfolded it was clear that in some communities AOTE became one more program in a series of programs that seem to regularly come and go. It seemed difficult for reform-weary school people to understand that AOTE was suppose to represent a different way of doing business rather than another prescriptive program. Perhaps there was simply too much reform clutter for this message to come through. We saw cynicism about reform models that are imported from the outside. We saw competing reform movements, including bottom-up reforms such as AOTE that work from the community outward; a growing top-down state standards movement that requires schools to teach all students to high academic standards and requires students to pass a high-school exit exam; a strong push in Alaska Native communities, through the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, to substantially revise the curriculum around Native knowledge and ways of knowing; and other local, state, and national reform efforts. While our case studies were unfolding, there was also a serious effort to substantially cut funding for rural schools, which took the time and attention of many superintendents to defend their rural education programs to unsupportive legislators. Making sense out of this complexity is one of the challenges of creating systemic reform in a turbulent environment. Observing how communities made sense out of a new reform process like AOTE, in the context of everything else that was going on, became a focal point of the two case studies where AOTE was just beginning: Klawock and Aniak/Kalskag.

In Klawock, there was frustration and cynicism because AOTE looked like other improvement programs from the outside that failed to gain widespread teacher and community buy-in or result in tangible educational changes. This attitude was only reinforced because AOTE was implemented in a very top-down manner by a strong superintendent rather than through a multi-stakeholder leadership team. In retrospect, a clear shortcoming was that no one—including the AOTE developers, trainers, facilitators, superintendent, or principal—was able to clearly articulate how a reform *process* like AOTE fits into past and ongoing improvement work. To busy teachers, it looked like more of what had not worked in the past. There were also signals that the neither the community nor school personal were really ready for strong community voice. There was a general satisfaction with Klawock's school program among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. No one felt the need for sweeping changes. It is very important that AOTE be seen by schools and community members as a principle-based reform rather than a prescriptive reform. AOTE provides the principles and a process while school and community create the specific educational changes. Not all professional staffs and local communities are ready to do this. Our case studies as a whole suggest that unless there is a strong public dissatisfaction with the current school system, the teachers and community members may be more ready to tinker around the edges with new programs than tackle the long and difficult journey of systemic reform.

Another lesson is that a series of fragmented programs will likely lead to equally fragmented results for students, as the following Klawock case study excerpt by Jim Kushman illustrates:

> AOTE was weakly implemented during the two-year effort, and no one would expect dramatic student results. If one considers the longer-term strategic planning reforms that AOTE was part of, Klawock again demonstrates that fragmented, programmatic reform—without the buy-in of teachers and community—leads to equally fragmented results for children. . . . AOTE should be a force not only for more community voice, but for helping districts and schools integrate the reforms they already have. Rather than adding yet another action plan for improvement, schools and districts need tools to figure out how to simplify so that more attention is given to achieving student results and less to reform activities that are often draining and unproductive.

Yet AOTE was a positive force in most communities because it helped set a clear direction and vision for student success and provided opportunities for school personnel and community members to think about and talk about how everyone should work together to educate children in a changing world. It was a process that people embraced because, as several case studies point out, it helped heal past wounds. AOTE was less successful, however, as a force for substantially changing teaching and learning. Here there was much more confusion about a course of action because there were already so many educational programs in place. How AOTE fit into this picture was unclear. In rural Alaska, there is boom or bust cycle of programs related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and technology. In the Aniak-Kalskag case study, Bruce Miller emphasizes that it is not a lack of caring that produces cyclical reform, but perhaps not enough attention paid is paid to the local educational context.

> Progress in the short run appears to have been made, as demonstrated by the efforts of AOTE, improved hiring practices, the implementation of a comprehensive literacy program, and the continued support of cultural curriculum opportunities such as Heritage Week, instruction in the Yup'ik language, and the Elder's Conference. But taken from a long-term perspective, these efforts seem piecemeal and episodic. For the most part, they seem to reflect the nature of funding with its grants and cyclical ups and downs but also conflicts in cultural values and the logistics of providing quality education in remote village schools. Interestingly, given what might appear to be insurmountable challenges, it was found that people cared about their children and their community and worked hard. Every teacher interviewed wanted to make a difference in the lives of students. Every parent interviewed wanted the best for their child. And

> every administrator and board member interviewed voiced strong concerns for the well-being of students. From an outsider perspective, educational reform efforts that have come and gone in Aniak and Kalskag (and maybe the school district in general) do not appear to come and go because of a lack of concern or desire for positive outcomes for children. They appear to be short lived because they disregard and in some cases dismiss local context. AOTE represents a case in point.

Other case studies show more integrated reforms. As described earlier, Tatitlek and the Chugach District, through strong superintendent leadership and community input on setting goals, and Quinhagak, through a great deal of support and community empowerment coming from the Lower Kuskokwim School District, were able to create more unified educational strategies that reflected the values and goals of the community. The efforts and accomplishments of New Stuyahok, working with the support and leadership of the Southwest Region School District, is another positive example of unified reforms.

In New Stuyahok, AOTE was effectively used as in other Alaska communities to develop a mission statement and set of learning goals. What distinguished New Stuyahok from some other places was how the superintendent, the leadership teams, the principals, and teachers went a step further and continued working together to develop creative solutions to achieve their goal. The mission and goals became more than a poster on classroom walls. A series of coordinated innovations was created to increase student success in postsecondary education. First, content-certified teachers (e.g., the life science teacher) moved from community to community in a 12-week rotation. The itinerant teachers provided students from all villages the opportunity to take quality high-school science courses from subject-area specialists, something that usually is not possible in rural isolated high schools with small staffs. The district then converted to a project-based curriculum to coincide with the rotating teachers. Students work intensely on a science project to demonstrate their skills and mastery of content. Further, science projects were integrated into the language arts and math curricula. District and village leadership teams also realized that one reason students with high potential fail after high school is that they leave the village to attend college only to become homesick and return home at the urging of their parents. To alleviate this problem, a transition counselor position was added to increase student success in postsecondary education. This counselor prepares high-school students for college experiences and teaches parents how to interact with their children from afar to encourage and support them.

With the superintendent, principal, teachers, counselors, parents, and students working together in a unified way, there have been positive results for students across the district and in New Stuyahok in postsecondary success, as Jerry Lipka's case study points out. The once-distant goal of having more students going to and staying in college has become a reality because of creativity, effort, unity of purpose, and passion towards a goal that truly motivated people to work together. This is the heart of systemic reform.

Creating Healthy Communities

Our case studies focused on understanding how rural districts, schools, and communities work together to achieve greater educational attainment for this generation and future generations of students who must "walk in two worlds with one spirit." As our findings unfolded through site visits and the many meetings together in Anchorage, Portland, and Fairbanks, it became obvious that education is a means to healing past wounds in Alaska Native communities. A meta-theme underlying the previous five themes is the idea that education in rural Alaska has a larger purpose than teaching academic skills and knowledge. The AOTE process brought out the deeper hopes, dreams, and fears of communities that are trying to preserve their identity and ways of life in a global and technological world. In the communities studied, we saw traditional language, dance, craftmaking, and subsistence ways of life coexisting with satellite television, Internet connections, and other outside influences that present a very different worldview and values. In collecting qualitative data on students, we saw signs of anger and alienation among young people who struggle to find an identity amidst confusing messages from adults and the outside world. The AOTE vision-setting process resulted in as many community wellness goals as academic goals. People expect the education system to help young people respect their elders, respect themselves, stay sober and drug free, and learn self-discipline. Some schools and communities tried to achieve a broader definition of "educational reform" than narrow academic goals, and some saw academic goals as a means to community wellness rather than an end in itself. There was a clear sense that education and community health are inextricably linked.

AOTE resulted in districts and communities challenging themselves to simultaneously achieve high cultural standards and high academic standards as a means to improved community health. While the desire is there to use education as a way to preserve language and culture and promote community wellness, schools in rural Alaska do not yet have all the tools and know-how to achieve this end. Efforts like the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative are making headway. But at the same time, threatened and real funding cuts to rural schools make matters worse because resources are needed to create the curricular, instructional, and assessment materials that will help integrate Native knowledge and Western-style, standards-based education. A final passage from the Tuluksak case study by Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt illustrates the difficulty of achieving a truly integrated educational system.

> The same ambivalence and mixed message regarding the purpose of education is reflected in the curriculum offerings and practices in schools. While everyone agrees on the need for the school to prepare the students for life in both the local and global context, there is little consistency in how this is addressed on a day-to-day basis. There are bits and pieces of each, but no cumulative, integrated approach that helps students (or teachers and parents) sort through the confusion and ambiguities involved. For example, the bilingual/bicultural program has been in place in Tuluksak for a long time and has not worked at producing bilingualism in the students, though that is what everyone desires. The Yupiat people have been asking the school to help them re-enliven their language and life-ways. However, the school has been unable to take the steps that must be taken to accommodate this major shift in paradigm to reengage the incentive to excel and succeed on the part of the Yupiat youngsters. How do the Yupiat people reinstill self-discipline in the young people if the schools are unable to contribute to strengthening the Yupiaq language and life-ways? Why is quality education not there?

Quality education may not be all there yet, but our case studies offer many examples of successful reform efforts that are making inroads in creating healthier communities in rural Alaska. Just as Alaska Native students need role models that create a positive self-image, local schools need role models showing how community voice can be used to heal past wounds. Our full case studies present rich descriptions of curricular and instructional models for other communities to follow. These include the Yup'ik first-language curriculum in Quinhagak, the itinerant high-school teacher model in New Stuyahok, the emerging Yup'ik Education for the 21st Century initiative in Tuluksak, Heritage Week and the Elder's Conference in Aniak and Kalskag, the Caribou Project in Koyukuk, Cultural Heritage Week in Tatitlek, the Native Arts Program in Klawock, and others. All of our communities have something positive to offer others, and there are many more positive examples throughout Alaska. Rural educators can look to many promising programs in their own and neighboring communities to create healthy and educated young people. As we enter a new millennium, a new paradigm of communities and schools working in true partnership is taking shape.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made from the findings and lessons learned resulting from the seven rural Alaska case studies of Alaska Onward to Excellence and related school reforms. While the recommendations pertain most directly to Alaska rural schools, many of the issues addressed are generalizable to rural schools anywhere.

1. Stabilize professional staff in rural schools.

There is no issue that bears more heavily on the long-term viability of any school reform effort in rural Alaska than the perennial turnover of professional personnel. This is self-evident when we look at the fact that of the 2,368 teachers in rural schools in 1998-99, nearly one third were new to their positions. While rural schools employ only one-third of all the teachers in the state, they typically hire over two thirds of the new teachers each year, most of whom originate from outside the state. That means that at the present time, the potential for improving the quality of education in rural schools has an upper limit that is established by the average three-year cycle of staff turnover.

The only realistic solution to this problem is an increased emphasis on the preparation of strong home-grown teachers who come with a lifetime commitment to education in rural Alaska. Responsibility for addressing this issue falls on all parties: school districts through career ladders and staff development plans; the Alaska Department of Education through licensing regulations and teacher education standards; the universities through appropriate teacher preparation programs; and rural communities through their commitment to locally controlled education.

Whatever other steps are taken, the long-term improvement of education in rural Alaska is dependent on a stable, culturally knowledgeable cadre of professional educators. The state must invest in the programs necessary to bring this about (e.g., the

Rural Educator Preparation Partnership) if it is to fulfill its constitutional obligations to all the children of Alaska.

2. **Provide role models and support for creating a positive self-image to which students can aspire.**

Students in rural Alaska are often caught in a tug of war between their identity as members of the indigenous culture inherent in their community and family heritage and the pervasive influences of the outside world, particularly as manifested in the school and on television. While there are exemplary programs (e.g., Kashunamiut Cultural Heritage Program) that recognize the need to address all aspects of students' development, too often the focus of the school is limited to academic development alone and as a result contributes to disaffection, aimlessness, and alienation among students. Guidelines for overcoming this limitation of schooling have been spelled out by Native educators in the student section of the Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools. Following are the main points put forward by the Cultural Standards to address this issue .

- Culturally knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community.
- Culturally knowledgeable students are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local cultural community as a foundation from which to achieve personal and academic success throughout life.
- Culturally knowledgeable students are able to actively participate in various cultural environments.
- Culturally knowledgeable students are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning.
- Culturally knowledgeable students demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in the world around them.

3. Parent involvement needs to be treated as a partnership with more shared decision making.

Parent involvement has been a consistent theme throughout the AOTE case studies. Too often, however, it is viewed as a one-way street whereby parents are expected to be the passive supporters of the school's agenda. The lesson from the AOTE experience in rural Alaska is that parent involvement must be seen as a two-way partnership in which parents and teachers work hand in hand to make what students experience in school and the life they lead outside the school complementary. This is especially crucial in Native communities where the language and culture of the community should provide the foundation for the school curriculum and teaching practices. The Quinhagak case study illustrates the benefits when a true partnership is established between the school and community.

4. Implement teacher orientation, mentoring, and induction programs in rural schools.

A renewed commitment to preparing home-grown teachers (as outlined in the first recommendation) is not in itself going to bring about the needed improvements in the schools of rural Alaska. It is a necessary but not sufficient step. Alaska is importing over three fourths of the teachers in the state. To get at this issue, the state will need to address the problem at another more fundamental level: the level of in-depth cross-cultural orientation and mentoring programs for all teachers new to rural Alaska. New teachers, whether from within the state or out of state, on a provisional certificate should be encouraged to participate in a teaching internship/induction program provided jointly by the local school district and the university. In districts where cultural disparities are an issue, the internship period should include training in cross-cultural teaching practices based on activities such as the following:

- New teachers should be encouraged to participate in a district-sponsored cultural orientation program during their first year or two, which could include participation in a week-long camp with local elders as the instructors sometime during the fall term (Lower Yukon and Kodiak Island Borough School Districts have successfully implemented such programs).

- New teachers should be paired with an elder in the community and a respected experienced teacher in the school (or an experienced Native teacher) to serve as mentors throughout the first year of teaching.
- A program of study based on the "Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools" and "Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers" should be made available to guide the teachers in the translation of their new insights into culturally appropriate curriculum and teaching practice (the Alaska Staff Development Network has already prepared materials for such a program of study).
- For interested teachers, a two-year field-based course of study should be made available leading to a specialty endorsement in "cross-cultural education" and/or a graduate degree in cross-cultural studies. All of the above could also fulfill the current state multicultural education and Alaska studies requirements.

5. Eliminate testing requirements that interfere with language immersion programs.

The recent legislatively mandated graduation exams are beginning to interfere with some of the most promising educational reform initiatives (e.g., the Quinhagak Yup'ik immersion program). The testing mandates are being extended all the way down to the early grades, often preempting attention to anything other than the topics to be covered on the test. The early promise of language immersion programs for Native students should not be short-circuited by English-based testing requirements, especially early benchmark exams that will penalize the students for having learned reading, writing, and math in their own language rather than English. There is mounting research evidence to indicate that students taught in their own language throughout the early years of school will out-perform those taught in English in the long run. If Native-speaking students are to be tested in the elementary grades, they should have the option to take the exams in their own language, so that they are judged on what they know, not on the language in which they display what they know.

6. **Strategic planning needs to extend to the next generation or more (20-plus years) at the state and local levels.**

As rural school districts in Alaska enter into strategic planning processes like AOTE, they too often limit their field of vision to three to five years down the line, because that is the timeframe around which many planning models are built and implemented. However, the most endemic and persistent issues facing rural schools are often cross-generational in nature and therefore must be addressed over a span of 20 years or more. While such timeframes may exceed the anticipated longevity of many of the current professional staff, cross-generational influences are often at the heart of the issues of greatest concern to the elders and other community participants. It would be well if schools adopted the old Native American dictum that all issues should be considered and understood in the context of seven generations past and seven generations into the future. Without such a long-term perspective we fail to recognize and build upon the experiences of those who have gone before.

7. **We need curriculum support for culturally responsive, place-based approaches that integrate local and global academic and practical learning.**

The most promising curricular reform strategies for rural schools are those that actively engage students as participants in and contributors to their home community. This is the central thrust of the Annenberg Rural Challenge. Though the emphasis of the Alaska case studies is on rural schools serving Native communities, many of the lessons are applicable to all students and communities because they focus curricular attention on in-depth study of the surrounding physical and cultural environment in which the school is situated, while recognizing the unique contribution that indigenous people can make to such study as long-term inhabitants who have accumulated extensive specialized knowledge related to that environment. By providing opportunities for students to engage in in-depth experiential learning in real-world contexts, there is a natural connection established between what students experience in school and their lives out of school. By shifting the focus in the curriculum from teaching and learning *about* cultural heritage as another subject to teaching and learning *through* the local culture as a foundation for all education, all forms of knowledge, ways of knowing, and world views can be recognized as equally valid, adaptable, and complementary to one another in mutually beneficial ways.

8. **Encourage the development of multiple paths for students to meet the state standards.**

Students bring diverse skills and knowledge to the educational enterprise, so they should be offered multiple avenues to build upon and display what they know and are able to do. Given the current emphasis on standards, educators need to understand that the state-stipulated standards represent an end goal, but there are many routes that can be taken to reach that goal—standards should not equal standardization of educational opportunity. While the state content and performance standards stipulate what students should know and be able to do, the cultural standards that have been developed by Native educators are oriented more toward providing guidance on how to get them there in such a way that they become responsible, capable, and whole human beings in the process. Schooling should be tailored to the needs of the individuals, communities, and cultures being served. To offer only limited options inevitably serves to the advantage of some students at the expense of others, without regard for the unique educational strengths and needs that each student brings.

9. **Extend the cultural standards and Native ways of knowing and teaching into teacher preparation programs.**

A central theme in all of the Alaska case studies was the need for teachers who are able to integrate the local culture into the curriculum and teaching practices in culturally and educationally appropriate ways. The "Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers" prepared by Native educators (available through the Alaska Native Knowledge Network) provides detailed recommendations on what teachers should know and be able to do to teach to the "Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools." All school districts, universities, and the Alaska Department of Education are encouraged to incorporate the cultural standards and associated guidelines into their programs for the preparation of teachers for rural Alaska schools. Following is a summary of the cultural standards applicable to educators:

- Culturally responsive educators incorporate local ways of knowing and teaching in their work.
- Culturally responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students.
- Culturally responsive educators participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way.
- Culturally responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve complementary educational expectations between home and school.
- Culturally responsive educators recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential.

10. Sustainable reform needs to be a bottom up rather than a top down process and has to have a purpose beyond reform for reform's sake.

People in rural Alaska have seen numerous school reform initiatives come and go over the years, only to be replaced by a new initiative (and often a recycled old initiative under a new name) with each new principal or superintendent (or legislature) on the scene, each seeking to make his or her mark on the educational landscape. If school reform is to become sustainable over time, it is going to have to shift from a top-down approach to a bottom-up approach, so the ownership and commitment that is needed is embedded in the communities involved and reform is not something that someone else does to them (the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative is one example of an attempt at bottom-up reform). Furthermore, the purpose for the reforms must be clear and widely supported if they are to last beyond the tenure of the current proponents. Reform for reform's sake has no durability and is likely to become an obstacle to meaningful long-term initiatives.

11. Alaska Onward to Excellence (AOTE) should be put forward as a means (process) rather than an end in itself (program).

AOTE is a planning process that engages the local community and school in an ongoing examination of the role of the school, with a continuous feedback loop on the steps needed to fulfill the role that is decided upon. AOTE is not a one-time program to arrive at a one-time-and-for-all solution to a particular problem. The student learning outcomes of the AOTE process should be different for each community, school, and district that implements it based on the unique needs and makeup of that community, school, and district. While the process may appear similar from one place to the next, the details and therefore the results will be different. School districts should enter into the AOTE process with an open-ended agenda, allowing the appropriate steps to emerge as the process unfolds.

12. Form a coalition of organizations to sponsor an annual conference on rural education that keeps reform issues up to date and forward reaching.

A regularly recurring process is needed to review the current status of school and curricular reform initiatives in rural Alaska and showcase the most promising curriculum models, and materials and teaching and schooling practices on an on going basis. Following are some of the steps that should be taken to establish such a process through an annual statewide rural education conference (originally proposed by participants in the Alaska Rural Education Leadership Retreat):

- *Purposes of conference:* review status of school and current reform initiatives in rural Alaska, showcasing promising models based on school curriculum reform; provide participants with strategies to apply and adapt practices in their schools; and develop support network to continue work on conference tasks.
- *Who participates:* representative team from regions, communities, districts, and schools—all stakeholders, including parents (Parent Teacher Associations), Indian Education Act Committees, students (Future Teachers of Alaska), policy makers

(Alaska Association of School Boards, legislature, tribal councils, Indian Reorganization Act Councils), practitioners (teachers, associate teachers, and aides), elders and young elders, Native Educator Associations, higher education (teacher educators, Rural Educator Preparation Partnership, Native Administrators for Rural Alaska), administrators (Alaska Council of School Administrators), and news media.

- *Issues to address:* extend learning beyond classroom walls; partnership theme of open access to education; assessment and practices for success; consolidation and closure; technology and distance education; transition beyond high school; adapting curriculum to cultural and physical regions; healthy community and family; barriers to achievement; role models; and student, parent, and community involvement in school change.
- *Outcomes:* edit and broadcast one-hour video; document and distribute proceedings; send participants back with DVD for immediate use with students; and incorporate teacher- and student-produced products for dissemination.

These are the major recommendations that have been gleaned from the case studies of communities involved in Alaska Onward to Excellence and other reforms. While they are framed in terms of their applicability to the Alaska scene, they are readily generalizable to rural schools and communities anywhere in the country. Inherent in all the school reform efforts described in these case studies and recommendations is the notion that education is first and foremost a local endeavor. By understanding how such an endeavor is played out in the local contexts of rural Alaska, we also should understand better how it can be played out in any other local context.

REFERENCES

Alaska Department of Education (1998). *Alaska Quality Schools Initiative*. Juneau: Author.

Alaska Federation of Natives (1994). *Final report and recommendations*. Anchorage: Author.

Argyris, C. & Schon, D. A. (1991). Participatory action research and action science compared: A commentary. In W. F. Whyte (Ed.), *Participatory Action Research*, 85-96. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1998). *Alaska standards for culturally responsive schools*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Knowledge Network, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Barnhardt, C. (1994). *Life on the other side: Alaska Native teacher education students and the University of Alaska Fairbanks.* Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia.

Barnhardt, R. & Kawagley, A. O. (1998). Culture, chaos and complexity: Catalysts for change in indigenous education. *Journal of School Leadership* (Fall issue).

Chavkin, N. F. (Eds.) (1993). *Families and schools in a pluralistic society.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

D'Angelo, A. & Alder, R. (1991). Chapter I: A catalyst for improving parent involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 72(5),* 350-354.

Epstein, J. L. (1991). Paths to partnership: What we can learn from federal, state, district, and school initiatives. *Phi Delta Kappan, 72(5),* 345-349.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, (May issue),* 701-712.

Gomez, M. (1997). *Science and mathematics for all.* Washington, DC: National Science Foundation.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research, 67(1),* 3-42.

Hopson, E. (1977). Inupiaq education. In R Barnhardt (Ed.), *Cross-cultural issues in Alaskan education*. Fairbanks, AK: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Jones, R. (1994). Chaos theory. *The Executive Educator* (October), 20-23.

Kawagley, A. O. (1995). *A Yupiaq world view: A pathway to ecology and spirit.* Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Kawagley, A.O. & Barnhardt, R. (1999). Education indigenous to place. In G. Smith & D. Williams (Eds.), *Ecological education in action* (pp. 117-140). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lipka, J. (1998). Transforming schooling: From possibilities to actuality? In *Transforming the Culture of Schools (pp. 185-201).* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lipka, J., Mohatt, G.V. & Ciulistet Group (1998). *Transforming the culture of schools.* New York: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

Marshall, S. P. (1996). Chaos, complexity and flocking behavior: Metaphors for learning. *Wingspread Journal 18*(3), 13-15. [also in *School Administrator*, January 1995]

Napoleon, H. (1991). *Yuuyaraq: The way of the human being.* Fairbanks, AK: Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Okakok, L. (1989) Serving the purpose of education. *Harvard Educational Review, 59(4),* 405-422.

Peck, K. L., & Carr, A. A. (1997). Restoring public confidence in schools through systems thinking. *International Journal of Educational Reform 6*(3), 316-323.

Tonsmeire, J. K. (1991). *Coalition for Alaskan at risk rural youth.* Juneau, AK: Alaska Staff Development Network.

Tushnet, N. C. (1003). *Guide to developing educational partnerships.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Waldrop, M. M. (1994). *Complexity: The emerging science at of the edge chaos.* New York: Doubleday.